Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle and Plato

Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition

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Athenian and Alexandrian Neoplatonism and the Harmonization of Aristotle and Plato

By

Ilsetraut Hadot

Translated by

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

In homage to my Italian colleagues
Rosa Lauredana Cardullo (*Catania*),
Daniela Patrizia Taormina (*Catania, now at Rome*),
and Francesco Romano (*Catania*),
to whose work I owe a great deal.

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Preface

The research I am presenting on the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato in Neoplatonism follows chronologically upon the excellent book by G.K. Karamanolis, entitled *Plato and Aristotle in agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry*.[1] For my part, I would like to show that this harmonizing tendency, born in Middle Platonism, as G. Karamanolis and also M. Zambon[2] have proved, prevailed in Neoplatonism from Porphyry and Iamblichus, and that it persisted in this philosophy until its end without any known exception, but with some nuances, which are due both to the proper personality of each of the Neoplatonists and to the stage of development of their doctrines. I therefore protest against an opinion that is still widespread, based ultimately on a paper by K. Verrycken,[3] according to which it was the late Neoplatonist Ammonius of Alexandria who introduced "an instrinsic simplification" into the Neoplatonism of Alexandria. From the period of Middle Platonism, we will mention, very briefly and in an introductory way, only a few characteristic elements of the harmonizing tendency that emerged in this interval, particularly those that lasted down the end of Neoplatonism. As far as Neoplatonism, the final period of Platonism, is concerned, I propose to give a significant, but by no means exhaustive, overview of the manifestations of this harmonizing tendency in its various representatives (including Themistius), beginning with Porphyry. It is true that the latter's position on this question has been studied in great detail by G.K. Karamanolis in his aforementioned book, but (on a rather important point) I will set forth a divergent opinion.

The present study thus has as its subject the extent and the limits of the Neoplatonist tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and it leaves aside the question of whether or not this tendency can be objectively justified: an important theme, for which I refer the reader to L.P. Gerson's book entitled *Aristotle and other Platonists*.[4]

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1 Karamanolis, G.K. 2006.

2 Zambon, M. 2002.

3 Verrycken, K. 1990 a, p. 230.

4 Gerson, L.P., 2005. The author writes (p. 7): "The question we need to try to face squarely is how much of this supposed harmony is fact and how much fancy". Eight highly instructive chapters, focused on the history of the interpretation of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, help to answer this question: 1. What is Platonism? 2. The esoteric writings and the early Aristotle. 3. The categories of reality. 4. Nature and its principles. 5. Psychology: souls and intellects. 6. Aristotle's Metaphysics. 7. Aristotle and the forms. 8. Aristotle's Ethics.

Closely linked to the problematic of the harmonizing tendency is the question of whether there exists a general, striking difference between the theologies and religious practices of the Neoplatonists teaching at Alexandria and those who were professors at Athens. I will answer this question in the negative, although emphasizing that the very meager documentary material available to us for the three centuries of Neoplatonism taught at Alexandria and Athens allows us to perceive only a tiny fraction of its history.

It is a highly pleasant duty for me to thank Mr. John Finamore, who accepted to publish this work in the collection "Studies in Platonism, Neoplatonism, and the Platonic Tradition" which he directs together with Mr. R. Berchmann. I also thank with all my heart my friend Mme Jeannie Carlier, for her conscientious re-reading of the manuscript.

Introduction

1 The Religious Orientation of the Alexandrian Neoplatonists from Theon of Alexandria to the Contemporaries of Ammonius, Son of Hermias

Still very recently, P. Golitsis, in his book *Les commentaires de Simplicius et de Jean Philopon à la* Physique *d'Aristote*,[1] expressed the following view: "As one can see from the commentaries emerging from one and the other school, the school of Athens was focused more on Plato, whereas the school of Alexandria had more interest in Aristotle. What is more, the school of Athens was a bastion of pagan culture and religion, which was probably not the case for the school of Alexandria (…) Let us mention by way of a guideline that essentially no activity concerning the *Orphic Hymns* or the *Chaldaean Oracles* is known to us on the part of the Alexandrians (…) Hierocles the Alexandrian, about whom Photius (cod. 214 of his *Library*) reports that he had devoted the fourth book of his treatise *On Providence* to Plato's agreement with the *Chaldaean Oracles*, seems to represent an exceptional case in the history of philosophical exegesis in Alexandria; he himself specified that the doctrine of the harmonization of theological traditions was handed down to him by his teacher Plutarch of Athens". Let us specify that in this same book, it is not only the *Chaldaean Oracles* that Hierocles wished to place in agreement with Plato's doctrines, but also the "hieratic institutions" and theurgy,[2] and in his commentary on verses 67–69 of the *Carmen aureum*, he declares that theurgy, the ἱερατικὴ ἀναγωγή, is an indispensable complement to philosophical theory. In the fifth book of his *De providentia*, Hierocles makes a connection between the philosophy of Plato, Orpheus, and Homer.[3] Let us also mention, already at this stage in our argument, that the sixth book preaches the harmony of the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato.

Let us pause for a moment over the question of the role played by theurgy for Hierocles. I discussed this subject in detail in a German article published in

1 Golitsis, P. 2008, p. 9, n. 9.

2 In the *De mysteriis* of Iamblichus, the hieratic or theurgical art refers both to the ritual of the *Chaldaean Oracles* and to that of the *Hermetica*, another collection of revelations integrated into Neoplatonism, which this time took their starting point from Hermes Trismegistus.

3 See I. Hadot 2004, *Studies on the Neoplatonist Hierocles*, the chapter on "Hierocles' ideas on the history of Platonic philosophy", pp. 5–14. This book basically takes up, in English translation, the chapters on Hierocles contained in I. Hadot 1978, and most of the themes of my controversy with N. Aujoulat (in *REG* 103 [1990] and 106 [1993]).

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2002,[4] as well as in the chapter on "Theurgy" of my *Studies on the Neoplatonist Hierocles*. My position on this subject is not different from that of H. Schibli,[5] who elaborated it at the same time as I did. Here is a very brief summary: in chapters XXV, XXVI and XXVII of his commentary on the *Carmen Aureum*, which is intended for beginners, Hierocles describes the relation between philosophy and theurgy, without ever using the word "theurgy", obviously because it is not present in the poem being commented upon. In the *Carmen aureum*, the terms that to him evoke theurgy are καθαρμοί (purifications) and λύσις ψυχῆς (deliverance of the soul), in verses 67–68. According to Hierocles, the return of the rational human soul to its fatherland is possible only on condition of a twofold purification: that of the rational soul itself, and that of its ethereal, pneumatic, or luminous vehicle, which was joined to the first soul by the demiurge. Each of these two kinds of purification is in turn divided into two, as is indicated by the following text:[6]

> The purifications required for the rational soul are the mathematical sciences, and the elevating deliverance (ἀναγωγὸς[7] λύσις) is the dialectical vision of beings (ἡ διαλεκτικὴ τῶν ὄντων ἐποπτεία).[8] This is why 'deliverance' has been stated [*sc.* in the *Carmen aureum*] in the singular: 'in the soul's deliverance', because deliverance is completed in a single science, whereas mathematics contains a plurality of sciences. It is also necessary to ordain for the luminous body prescriptions analogous to those that are appropriately transmitted for the soul's purification and deliverance. Telestic purifications (τελεστικοὶ καθαρμοί) must therefore come together with those of mathematical purifications (μαθηματικοὶ καθαρμοί), and hieratic elevation (ἱερατικὴ ἀναγωγή) must accompany dialectical deliverance (διαλεκτικὴ λύσις). For these things are particularly apt to purify the pneumatic vehicle of the rational soul and render it perfect, to separate it from matter's lack of life, and to prepare it to be apt to have converse with the pure pneumas [sc. pure pneumatic bodies] …

4 I. Hadot 2002 a, "Die Stellung des Neuplatonikers Simplikios zum Verhältnis der Philosophie zu Religion und Theurgie", *Signatur des spätantiken Denkens*, pp. 323–342.

5 H. Schibli 2002, *Hierocles of Alexandria*, pp. 115 ff.

6 Hierocles, *In Carm. aur.*, XXVI, 21–22, p. 116, 20–117, 10 Köhler.

7 I owe to M. Chase the correction of the reading ἀνάγωγος in Köhler's edition to ἀναγωγὸς.

8 On the Platonic and Neoplatonic division of philosophy into ethics, physics, and dialectic (*pars rationalis* in Latin), or ethics, physics, and epoptics, cf. P. Hadot 1979, "Les divisions de la philosophie …", p. 206 (131 ff.) and 218–220 (145–148).

The purifications of the rational soul thus consist, first, in learning the mathematical sciences, and then in the practice of Platonic dialectics, understood as the highest form of philosophy. In parallel, there are two degrees of purification of the luminous or pneumatic vehicle: the telestic purifications, which, as we will learn a bit farther on,[9] include all the rituals of the pagan cults, and correspond to the learning of mathematics, and hieratic elevation, the highest form of theurgy, which is analogous to the highest stage of Platonic philosophy. In two places, Hierocles insists on the necessity of practicing both these two kinds of purification: that of the rational soul by philosophy, and that of the luminous vehicle by theurgy. If one neglects theurgy, philosophy loses its strength:

> This is why philosophy is united with the art of sacred things (τῇ τῶν ἱερῶν τέχνῃ), since it is concerned with the purification of the luminous vehicle, and if you separate the philosophical intellect from the art, you will find that it no longer has the same power (δύναμις). Indeed, of the factors that work together to complete our perfection, some were first discovered by the philosophical intellect, and others were introduced by telestic activity (τελεστικὴ ἐνέργεια), following the philosophical intellect.[10]

Shortly before,[11] Hierocles said that the pneumatic body must be purified

> by following the sacred laws and the techniques of the sacred rites. This purification is, as it were, more corporeal. This is why it has recourse to various matters … but this entire practice, if it is done in a way fitting to the gods and not in a beggarly-priestly manner (ἀγυρτικῶς), is in conformity with the canons of truth and virtue.

These texts and others leave no doubt that Hierocles fully subscribed to the Chaldaean doctrines of theurgic elevation.

If we can judge by a text by Damascius,[12] Theosebius, the only one of Hierocles' many students at Alexandria whom we know by name, shared his teacher's view on this subject. After stating that this Theosebius concerned himself primarily with moral philosophy, that he had composed paraenetic works in the genre of Epictetus, and had become, as it were, the Epictetus of his time, without, however, adhering to Stoic doctrines, Damascius adds:

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9 Hierocles, *In Carm. aur.*, XXVI, 26, p. 118, 10 ff. Köhler

10 Hierocles, *In Carm. aur.*, XXVI, 24–28, p. 117, 20 ff. Köhler.

11 Hierocles, *In Carm. aur.*, XXVI, 8–9, p. 113, 6 ff. Köhler.

12 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 46D Athanassiadi.

> For Theosebius loved and admired nothing so much as the truth of Plato. Indeed, he had written a tiny little book on what was artfully written in the great *Republic*, exalting in his words the theosophy that came from the gods; for it was this theosophy that he particularly esteemed and venerated.

In the vocabulary of the Neoplatonists, the term "theosophy" designated above all that of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, but also that of the Hellenes: that is, the *Orphica*, the mystery rites and the ancestral myths. Theosebius therefore applied himself, as Proclus was to do slightly later in his *Platonic Theology*, to reveal the links between the traces of the theosophy of the Hellenes in Plato and the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Moreover, Damascius tells how he had practiced exorcism concerning a woman:[13]

> Since the demon could not be persuaded by more gentle words to leave the woman, Theosebius forced it to leave her by conjuration (ὅρκῳ), although he did not know magic and had not practiced theurgy. He conjured it by laying claim to the rays of the sun and the God of the Jews. The demon was driven away, crying that he feared gods, but that he was also ashamed before him [*scil.* Theosebius].

The important anagogic and salvific role played by the rays of the sun (Helios), invoked by Theosebius, in the Chaldaean and Hermetic rites is well known.[14] Nor is it surprising that Theosebius should appeal to the God of the Jews. In

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13 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 46B Athanassiadi

14 Cf. among other evidence, emperor Julian, *Oration* VIII (V) "On the Mother of the Gods", 172b–d, p. 121 Rochefort (translation slightly modified): If the sun with its visible rays attracts earthly things toward it, "how could it fail to attract and carry off the fortunate souls, by means of its invisible, completely incorporeal, pure essences which are established in its rays? … Let us now suppose that I say a word about the arcana of the mystagogy of which the inspired Chaldaean (Julian) has spoken with regard to the seven-rayed God, by whose intervention he raised souls toward heaven: I would say unknown things, fully unknown, at least, to the populace, but familiar to the blessed theurges. That is why I will keep silent about them for the moment". The seven-rayed God is mentioned, *inter alia*, by Proclus, *In Tim.*, I, p. 34, 21 Diehl, this time as being the paredros, along with *Dikê* and the Elevator, of the Sun god. For its salvific role, cf. *Corpus Hermeticum*, vol. II, treatise XVI, 16, p. 237 Nock-Festugière: "If, therefore, in the rational part of his soul, a man receives the light of the divine ray through the intermediary of the Sun (such men are very few in number), in this case the demons are reduced to impotence, for none, either of demons or of gods, has any kind of power against a single one of the God's rays".

general, the Neoplatonists accepted the religious traditions of all peoples, as long as they were ancient. Since the city of Alexandria had played host for centuries to a large Jewish community, which was prosperous, well-educated, and largely Hellenized as far as language was concerned—it was at Alexandria that the Torah was translated into Greek—there is nothing extravagant about invoking the Jewish God. Even if this exorcism had been the only theurgic act Theosebius had performed in his life, his example gives a good illustration of the state of mind of the Neoplatonists at Alexandria in the first half of the 5th century.

P. Golitsis' affirmation that Hierocles, by including, at the beginning of the 5th century, the *Chaldaean Oracles* and, we should add, the *Orphica*, within Platonic philosophy was "an exceptional case" at Alexandria is thus already contradicted by the example of Theosebius, but it is also invalidated by numerous other historical facts.[15] To be sure, the person who really introduced the *Chaldaean Oracles* into Neoplatonic philosophy, and along with them Orphism and Hermeticism, was Iamblichus, who did not teach either at Alexandria or at Athens. Already before Hierocles, however, in the second half of the 4th century of our era, Theon of Alexandria, the Neoplatonic philosopher and member of the Museum,[16] father of the Neoplatonic philosopher Hypatia, known primarily as a mathematician, astronomer and astrologer, and who, like Iamblichus, was interested in the techniques of divination,[17] had "taught and interpreted the writings of Hermes Trismegistus and of Orpheus".[18] We know the name of another Alexandrian astronomer and astrologer who was Theon's contemporary: Paul of Alexandria, whose work also testifies to his interest in the Hermetica.[19]

Another philosopher trained at Alexandria is of interest to us. Synesius of Cyrene, who would later be bishop of Ptolemais for two years, and who lived at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the fifth century († 413), never studied at

15 Cf. also P. Chuvin 1988, "I filosofi e la loro religione nella società di Alessandria nel v secolo", especially chapters II 'I Caldei ad Alessandria' and III 'Πάτρια e θειότερα d'Egitto'. Cf. also Ph. Hoffmann 1998, "La fonction des prologues exégétiques dans la pensée pédagogique néoplatonicienne", p. 213 n. 12: "nothing allows us to imagine (…) that the *Chaldaean Oracles* were accorded less authority among the Neoplatonists of Alexandria".

16 Cf. P. Chuvin 1988, p. 50.

17 *Suidae Lexicon* θ 205 = Pars II, p. 702 Adler. On intellectual and religious life at Alexandria in the time of Hierocles and before him, cf. also H.S. Schibli, 2002, pp. 8–13.

18 Ioh. Malalas, *Chronographia*, XIII, p. 343, 11–13 Dindorf.

19 Paulus Alexandrinus, pp. 93,20–94,5; 118,24–119,7.

Athens. He was the student of the Neoplatonic philosopher Hypatia of Alexandria (assassinated by Christians in 415), for whom he had a deep veneration and with whom he still corresponded long after having left Alexandria. Synesius, then, not only made abundant use of the *Chaldaean Oracles* in his *Hymns*, but, in the Neoplatonic manner, he integrated them within his theological system, also citing them occasionally in his *De insomniis*.[20] Where could he have come to know the *Chaldaean Oracles*, unless it was at Alexandria with Hypatia? In his instructive book entitled *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind*,[21] G. Fowden suggests that Synesius was familiar with the Hermetic books: "Synesius (…) gives in his *Dion* a revealing list of men renowned for their wisdom: Ammon,[22] Zoroaster, Hermes and Antony (Syne-

20 Cf. W. Theiler 1942. *Die chaldäischen Orakel und die Hymnen des Synesius* (reprinted in W. Theiler, *Forschungen zum Neuplatonismus*, Berlin 1966).

21 G. Fowden 1993, p. 179.

22 I completely agree with G. Fowden in writing 'Ammon', although I am aware of the different interpretations that have been given of the manuscript reading ᾽Αμοῦς at this place (Synesius, *Dion*, 260,10,3) and slightly before (*Dion*, 255,9,2), a reading which, alongside Amoun, is a form equivalent to Ammon. H.I. Marrou, 1963 "Synesius of Cyrene and Alexandrian Neoplatonism", p. 144, and others identify him with the famous monk Amous or Amoun of Nitria. With regard to the list discussed by G. Fowden, even from a chronological viewpoint, a Christian would have no place at the head of the list, before Zoroaster and Hermes, the representatives of ancient pagan religions, but at the end, beside his correligionary Anthony. Personally, I very much doubt that even the monk Anthony could have appeared in Synesius' authentic text. We might conceivably have to do with Antoninus, whom we will discuss a bit later. In 404 Synesius wrote his *Dion*, openly directed, *inter alia*, against illiterate monks. He says in a letter (no. 154 of Roques' edition) to his revered philosopher teacher Hypatia of Alexandria that he was revealing to those who were sufficiently learned many "inviolable (ἀβέβηλοι, a term from the Mysteries) dogmas"—obviously Neoplatonic dogmas, otherwise why hide them from the broad public?—that will remain hidden to those who are unworthy of knowing them. They will only be understood by those "who receive illuminations (ἐκλάμψεις, a term from the *Chaldaean Oracles*) according to the intuitions of the intellect, and for whom God, thanks to the health of their intellectual eye (τὸ νοερὸν ὄμμα), lights a kindred light which is the cause for intellective beings (τοῖς νοεροῖς) to intelligize and for intelligibles (τοῖς νοητοῖς) the cause of being intelligized". The man who wrote that does not give me the impression of having wished, as H.-I. Marrou claimed, to carry out an amalgam between Christianity and pagan philosophy: quite the contrary. With regard to the first passage in which the reading 'Amous' appears (at 255,9,2), where H.-I. Marrou also wishes to recognize the monk Amous or Amoun of Nitria, it seems obvious to me, as it does to many others (cf. especially M.W. Dickie 1993, "Hermeias on Plato *Phaedrus* 238D and Synesius *Dion* 14.2", p. 428 ff.), that this can only be a reminiscence of a passage from Plato's *Phaedrus* (274 C–D), a dialogue often used in the

sius, *Dion* 10). It is a casual list, intended only to emphasize by contrast how foolish are the critics against whom the speech is directed; but that makes it all the more revealing. Clearly Ammon, like Hermes, derives from the *Hermetica*. Zoroaster was a similar sort of ancient oriental sage. And Antony of course was a Christian.[23] So what did Synesius know of the Hermetic philosophy? (…) As regards the first question, the reader of Synesius' hymns will often feel himself in the presence of an *anima naturaliter Hermetica*, though there are no formal allusions to the Hermetic literature. *Hymn* IX presents particularly striking parallels with the initiatory treatises of Hermes (note: see the notes to Terzaghi's edition of the *Hymni*, *passim*; and the remarks of Bizzochi, *Gregorianum* 32 (1951) 381–387. Vollenweider, *Synesios* 167–168, detects Hermetic inspiration in *Provid.*)".

In the same context, G. Fowden mentions Antoninus (died before 392),[24] "an early representative of a phenomenon once thought uncharacteristic of Alexandria, the Iamblichan holy man who combined with a love of Platonist philosophy a passionate sensibility for the beauty of religious cult and its centrality to a full spiritual life. Antoninus was the son of the rhetor and philosopher Eustathius and Sosipatra, a brilliant theurgical philosopher in her own right. His teacher was Aedesius, a pupil of Iamblichus who later became the focal point of a major Platonist circle in Pergamon. Like many of Iamblichus's intellectual heirs, Antoninus was fascinated by the religion of the Egyptians, to the point that he removed first to the 'holy city' (note: the phrase is Julian's, *ep*. 60.379a. See also Eun, V. Phil. VI.10.8 ἡ δὲ Ἀλεξάνδρεια … ἱερά τις ἦν οἰκουμένη) of Alexandria, and thence to Canopus on the coast a little to the east of the metropolis, where he appears to have settled in a temple and dedicated himself to the divine ritual and an ascetic personal regime. Soon the youth of pagan Alexandria was flocking to him, 'and the sanctuary', says Eunapius of Sardis (our only source), 'was full of young men [acting as] priests'. To his disciples and visitors Antoninus spoke with enthusiasm of the philosophy of Plato; and since Eunapius emphasizes his refusal to say anything at all about the doctrines of theurgy, we can be certain that he had inherited his mother's accomplishment in the sacred science. This reticence was in part the theurgist's

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Dion, in which the Egyptian king Thamous, who resided at Thebes, a city whose god, Plato specifies, is Ammon, gives his judgment on the inventions of the god Theut, including the invention of writing. One should therefore read 'Thamous' instead of 'Amous', or else suppose that we have to do with a later variant of this story, in which the god Thot goes to consult the god Ammon directly. The monk Amous has nothing to do with all this.

23 On a possible confusion between 'Antonius' and 'Antoninus' cf. above, note 22.

24 Cf. also P. Chuvin 1988, pp. 49 ff.

habitual secrecy, but also fear of Christian reprisals; and indeed it is Antoninus's prophecy of the collapse of the Sarapis cult throughout Egypt (fulfilled, as far as the famous Alexandrian Sarapeum was concerned, in 391) that Eunapius sees his greatest claim to fame:

> For while still in human guise, and conversing with mortal men, he foretold to all his followers that after him the temple would be no more, and that the great and holy sanctuaries of Sarapis would likewise pass into darkness and formlessness and be transformed, while the disfiguring darkness of mythical times would hold sway over the fairest things on earth (…) To everybody he said that the temples would become tombs.

One is struck by the resemblance of this passage to Hermes's prophecy in the *Asclepius* (*Ascl.* 24–27); and even more so by Antoninus's life-style, an imitation of the one attributed to Hermes and his pupils Asclepius, Tat and (H)Ammon in the same book".[25]

Not long after Hierocles' studies at Athens under Plutarch of Athens, the Alexandrian Hermias followed the teaching of Syrianus there, together with Proclus. At the end of his studies, he returned to Alexandria, where he taught in his turn. A commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus* has been handed down to us under his name, which is rich in references to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the *Orphica*, and to Hermes Trismegistus and his writings (see the index of Couvreur's edition).[26] In this regard, G. Fowden remarks[27] that Hermias referred to traditions concerning the life of this god that are mentioned only indirectly in other sources, and that, as Theon of Alexandria had already done, he had established a link between Hermes and Orpheus. Hermias (p. 87, 4 ff.) also comments positively on the function of animate statues.

I would also add that Hermias clearly shows the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle in his commentary.[28] This commentary by Hermias on the *Phaedrus*, which is almost certainly a testimony to his teaching at Alexandria, is to a large extent based on the classes of Syrianus, who is often named in them. Yet even if they were only notes taken at Syrianus' classes

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25 G. Fowden 1993, *The Egyptian Hermes* …, p. 182 ff.

26 Cf. especially Cl. Moreschini 2009, "Alla scuola di Siriano: Ermia nella storia del neoplatonismo", pp. 515–578, in particular §§ 5,2 (Gli Oracula Chaldaïca) et 5,3 (Orfeo), pp. 535–549. Cf. also H. Bernard 1997, *Hermeias von Alexandrien, Kommentar zu Platons "Phaidros"*, pp. 7–9.

27 G. Fowden 1993, p. 184.

28 See below, pp. 118–121.

at Athens, with no relation to the teaching of Hermias himself (which is not the opinion of the editor of this commentary, P. Couvreur,[29] of its translator, H. Bernard, of Cl. Moreschini;[30] nor is it my own view), would it be plausible that Hermias, once he had returned to Alexandria, immediately renounced the lessons received from Syrianus, and banished from his teaching any mention of the *Chaldean Oracles*, the *Orphica* and the Hermetic writings, thus consciously adopting a position that went against the grain of the spiritual orientation of the pagan philosophers of Alexandria? Hermias must have died at a rather young age, for his two sons, the future philosophers Ammonius and Heliodorus, were still children at the time of his death. We will talk a bit later about their mother Aidesia, who was extremely pious in the Neoplatonic sense, and was a relative of the Athenian philosopher Syrianus.

Let us note that so far, contrary to the affirmations of P. Golitsis, (1) we have not been able to discern any preference of the Alexandrians for Aristotle; (2) the doctrine concerning the harmony between the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato had already manifested itself in Hierocles and Hermias. (3) The *Orphica*, the Hermetic writings, and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, with theurgy, as well as the Pythagorean *Carmen Aureum* always played an important role at Alexandria.

With regard to the Neoplatonic philosophers Isidore, teacher of Damascius, the last diadoch of the school of Athens, and Asclepiodotus, both of whom were teaching members of the famous school of Horapollo,[31] together with Heraiscus and Ammonius, the Christian Zacharias Scholasticus describes them as "magicians". Isidore is said to have been recognized as an "obvious magician and an

29 Cf. P. Couvreur 1971², *Hermeias von Alexandrien, In Platonis Phaedrum Scholia*, p. VIII.

30 Cf. H. Bernard, 1997, *Hermeias von Alexandrien …*, pp. 4; 10–23; Cl. Moreschini 2009, "Alla scuola di Siriano …", pp. 516–522. Cf. below, p. 118 with n. 203.

31 Zacharias Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*, *P.O.* 2, pp. 15–23 is our main ancient source for this school. This institution apparently did not survive the persecutions by the Christians, which followed upon battles in this school between Christians and pagans, and the revolt of Illus. To reconstitute, with some differences in detail, these episodes, which were without any doubt dramatic for the pagan philosophers, as well as philosophical life after these events, use has often been made essentially of the *Life of Isidore* by Damascius, the *Life of Severus* and the dialogue *Ammonius* by Zacharias Scholasticus. Cf., among other works, D. Blank, 2005, article "Ammonius"; P. Chuvin 1990, *Chronique des derniers païens*, pp. 108–114; P. Athanassiadi 1999, *Damascius, The Philosophical History*, pp. 20–32; M. Tardieu 1990, *Routes et haltes syriennes d'Isidore à Simplicius*, pp. 19–20; I. Hadot 2007a, "Dans quel lieu le néoplatonicien Simplicius a-t-il fondé son école de mathématiques, et où a pu avoir lieu son entretien avec un manichéen?", especially pp. 72–74.

agitator" (*Life of Severus*, p. 22, 15 Kugener), and it was said of Asclepiodotus that he "concerned himself with spells, practiced magic, and made demonic invocations", and that he had "thereby won the admiration of the pagans for his philosophy" (*Life of Severus*, pp. 16–17 Kugener). Let us not be fooled: beginning with Augustine, the Christians deliberately used the term "magic" both for ordinary magic and for the theurgy linked with the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the Hermetic writings (cf. *De civ. Dei* X,9,1), and the texts quoted merely express the fact that the two philosophers were known as theurgists. According to the Neoplatonist philosopher Damascius, this same Ascepiodotus was very pious (*The philosophical history = Life of Isidore*, frg. 83 A Athanassiadi) and possessed divine powers (fr. 81), whose manifestation Damascius describes in fr. 81[32] and 87 A (2nd half) Athanassiadi. Like Isidore, Asclepiodotus had been the student of Proclus at Athens, and the master had dedicated to him his commentary on the *Parmenides*, the *nec plus ultra* of Platonic philosophy, in words that testify to the high esteem he felt for his student and friend: "As for you, Asclepiodotus, who have an intellect truly worthy of philosophy and who are the dearest of my friends …".[33] All by itself, this complicity between the two philosophers suffices to exclude major differences in their religious and philosophical attitudes. Simplicius (*In Phys*., p. 795, 17–11 Diels [cited below, p. 126, n. 223]) speaks of Asclepiodotus as Proclus's best student. Damascius informs us of the clear preference for the philosophy of Plato of the same Isidorus[34] we have just mentioned, who taught in the context of Horapollo's school at Alexandria. Isidorus did not concern himself with rhetorical or poetical erudition, but he had gone first of all straight to the philosophy of Aristotle, which was "much more divine". Yet once he had observed that this philosophy trusted more in the intellect using necessity than in the intellect that makes use of its own virtue (τῷ ἀναγκαίῳ μᾶλλον ἢ τῷ οἰκείῳ νῷ), and that while it made an effort to be technical, it did not propose, precisely, divine inspiration or intellectuality (τὸ ἔνθεον ἢ νοερόν), Isidorus granted little esteem to this philosophy as well. Not until he had tasted the Platonic notions did he think he no longer needed to keep searching, but had the hope of reaching his goal, if he was able to enter

32 On ἀπόρρητον as a theurgical term, see the Greek index to H. Lewy, *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy*, Troisième édition par M. Tardieu, Paris 2011.

33 Proclus, *In Parm*., 618,16–20, vol. I, 2, p. 2 Luna-Segonds. On the occasional difficulty, negligible in our context, of distinguishing this philosopher from his father-in-law Asclepiodotus of Aphrodisias, see the article by R. Goulet 1989 "Asclépiodote d'Alexandrie", pp. 626–631.

34 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Life of Isidorus*), fr. 34 C Athanassiadi; cf. also fr. 34 D.

into the intimate sanctuary of Platonic thought. The same Isidorus, who was, at Alexandria, the philosophy teacher of Damascius,[35] future diadoch of the school of Athens, was, moreover, by this very fact, at the origin of the new philosophical orientation of the school of Athens under the same Damascius (cf. below, p. 159 ff.), which once again shows the doctrinal interdependence of these two schools.

Heraiscus, another philosopher of the school of Horapollo, along with his brother Asclepiades,[36] also a very well-known philosopher at Alexandria, are mentioned in Damascius' *De principiis* (vol. III, p. 167 Combès-Westerink) as experts on Egyptian theology, having revealed its true hidden doctrine. Heraiscus had written a book, dedicated to Proclus, on the general doctrine of the Egyptians, and Damascius says of him[37] that he "spared no effort to gather [information] on the secret cults of the gods". Asclepiades, for his part, "had begun to write on the agreement of the Egyptians with the other theologians", that is, in the purest tradition of Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*, on the agreement, among others, of Greco-Egyptian Hermeticism[38] with the *Chaldean Oracles* and the *Orphica*. Among other subjects, Asclepiades had also written hymns to Egyptian gods.[39] Damascius describes Heraiscus as a Bacchus, that is, as a "genuine philosopher" (*The philosophical history = Life of Isidorus*, fr. 76A–D Athanassiadi), less because of any extended knowledge acquired through

35 In *codex* 181 of his *Library* [vol. II, p. 192 Henry] (a codex that contains a rather brief account of Damascius' *Life of Isidorus*), Photius affirms that Damascius claims to have learned dialectic under Isidorus, who, in this subject, surpassed all his contemporaries by the force of his reasoning powers. By this we must understand dialectic in the Platonic sense, that is, the method of ascent toward the Good, which has nothing to do with Aristotelian analytic and dialectic, which are mere argumentative techniques; cf. Proclus' definition of dialectic according to Plato, *In Parmenid.*, 649,1 ff., quoted after the translation by C. Luna-A. Segonds 2007, p. 40: "... [the dialectic] of Plato is called in his writings that which is highest and *purest in intellect and wisdom* (Plato, *Philebus* 58 D 6–7), because it established its domain among the intelligible forms, and because through these forms it goes toward what is that very thing that is at the summit of all the intelligible ...". Cf. P. Hadot 1979, "Les divisions des parties de la philosophie dans l'Antiquité", p. 206. Isidorus' teaching thus concerned the *summum* of Platonic theology. About this same Isidorus, Damascius (*The Philosophical History* [= *Vita Isidori*], fr. 34 A Athanassiadi) says that he was attached to the purest thoughts of Plato, not in the manner of most philosophers, but after Plato to the extraordinary subtleties of Iamblichus.

36 On these two brothers, see also A. Van den Kerchove 2012, *La voie d'Hermès* ..., p. 52 ff.

37 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 72 C Athanassiadi.

38 Cf. note 5, p. 240 by J. Combès in J. Combès–L.G. Westerink, *Damascius, Traité des premiers principes*, vol. III, Paris 1991.

39 *The philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 72 D Athanassiadi.

lengthy research, than by the innate gift of intuition that enabled him, for instance, in the cults linked to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, to know whether a sacred statue was animate or not (fr. 76 E Athanassiadi). This fragment ends as follows (quoted in the translation by P. Athanassiadi, p. 197):

> Thus so long as he lived there was something divine in him; and when he died, as Asclepiades prepared to render him the honours customary to the priests and in particular to wrap his body in the garments of Osiris, mystic signs bathed in light appeared everywhere on the sheets and around them divine visions which clearly revealed the gods with whom his soul now shared its abode. But his first birth[40] too was sacred and mystical. It is said that he was delivered of his mother into the light with a finger on his mouth enjoining silence, in the same way that Horus and before him Helios were born according to Egyptian legend. And as his finger was attached to his lips an operation was needed; his lip nevertheless bore throughout his life the scar of the incision, showing the mark of his mystical birth.—They say that even Proclus recognized Heraiscus as being superior to himself; for Heraiscus knew all that Proclus knew, whereas the reverse was not the case.

The portrait of Heraiscus that emerges from all the remarks by Damascius that I have just cited brings to life a very vivid portrait of the pagan milieu at Alexandria, with its mixture of ancestral religiosity transcended by Neoplatonic philosophy, quite similar to the milieu of the pagan Athenian philosophers, except, perhaps, that the Egyptian element was even more prominent in Alexandria than at Athens.[41]

As far as the *Orphica* are concerned, the philosopher Sarapion testifies to their continued presence at Alexandria.[42] Damascius (*The Philosophical History*, fr. 111 Athanassiadi) tells how this Alexandrian philosopher was extremely pious, and went to all the holy places, following the ancient cultic customs. He

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40 As P. Athanassiadi rightly remarks (1999, *Damascius. The Philosophical History*, p. 197, n. 192), the reference is to physical birth, as opposed to re-birth or re-generation through initiation.

41 On the influence of Egyptian religion on Neoplatonism and, more particularly, on Greek thought, cf. Matteo Andolfo 2008, *L'Uno e il tutto. La sapienzia egizia presso i Greci*.

42 The books by Fabienne Jourdan 2010 a: *Poème judéo-hellénistique attribué à Orphée*, and 2010 b: *Orphée et les Chrétiens*, t. I: *Orphée, du repoussoir au préfigurateur du Christ*, testify to the importance of the figure of Orpheus, particularly at Alexandria, since the Hellenistic period, and down to the second century of our era.

did not lead the life of a man, but, simply put, a divine life, ceaselessly uttering prayers or hymns or meditating in silence:

> he … was contemplative by nature, and did not think that one should spend one's time on the technical problems of philosophy, but he attached himself to vigorous concepts, by means of which one is seized by a divine transport. This is why he read almost nothing other than Orpheus.

Further on in the text, it becomes clear that it is Orpheus' poetry that is meant, and hence the *Orphic Hymns*. With regard to the mother (Aidésia) of Ammonius, who was himself a student of Proclus, she was a relative of the famous philosopher Syrianus of the Athenian school, who had initially wished to marry her to Proclus. She was finally united to a student of Syrianus, the philosopher Hermias, father of Ammonius (who was discussed shortly above), and lived with him at Alexandria; she was "so pious and holy and, in a word, beloved of the gods, that she was judged worthy of numerous divine apparitions".[43] Since his childhood in Alexandria, therefore, Ammonius had bathed in the atmosphere of theurgy, an atmosphere that his studies under Proclus at Athens certainly did not make him forget, and upon his return to Alexandria he found himself once again among colleagues who, as we have seen, were all filled with the syncretism and religiosity typical of late Neoplatonism.

Yet it is essentially on the basis of the person of Ammonius and of the members of his school (Philoponus as the editor of some of the courses of Ammonius, Olympiodorus, David [Elias],[44] Elias, and Asclepius) that the hypothesis has been constructed that there exists a profound difference between the Alexandrian and the Athenian school, with the latter being taken into account not throughout its entire duration, but essentially for the period of Syrianus-Proclus. We will discuss the doctrinal system of Ammonius and the members of his school later on in more detail.[45] Let us merely say here that all we possess by Ammonius and the members of his school, except for Olympiodorus, are commentaries on treatises belonging to the preparatory Aristotelian *cursus* which, since Porphyry, preceded the Platonic cycle of Neoplatonic studies. Most of Ammonius' commentaries have come down to us in the form of notes taken down by his students during his courses. We should not be surprised, given the

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43 Damascius, *The Philosophical History = Life of Isidorus*, fr. 56 Athanassiadi; on the role of epiphanies in the theurgy of Iamblichus, cf. Iamblichus, *De myst.*, II, 3–9 and W. Cremer 1969, *Die Chaldäischen Orakel und Jamblich de mysteriis*, pp. 37–53.

44 Cf. below, note 151, p. 52.

45 Cf. below, p. 26 and pp. 126 ff.

content of the texts to be commented, that his commentaries, and those of his school that deal with the logical treatises of Aristotle, do not quote either the *Chaldaean Oracles* or the *Orphica*, contrary to what happens in the commentaries written by Proclus on the Plato's *Timaeus* and *Parmenides*. We do not, in contrast, possess any commentary by Proclus on treatises of the Aristotelian *cursus*, and are therefore deprived of the possibility of undertaking an adequate comparison. However, from the confrontation between these commentaries belonging to completely different philosophical levels—commentaries on logical treatises by Aristotle on the one hand, and on the other commentaries on the two dialogues which, in the Neoplatonists' view, represented the quintessence of Platonic philosophy—one has not hesitated to draw the conclusion that Ammonius and his school were not interested either in the *Chaldaean Oracles* or in the *Orphica*. If, however, we limit ourselves to comparing what is comparable, we reach a quite different result. Let us take the case of Simplicius, a philosopher generally considered as representing the school of Athens in his quality as disciple of Damascius, whose theological system Simplicius had adopted. Simplicius' great commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* was written in exile after 538, after the composition of his commentaries on the *De Caelo* and the *Physics*. The commentary on the *Categories* does not cite either the *Chaldaean Oracles* or the *Orphica*, although Simplicius affirms at the very beginning of his commentary that he has followed the great commentary by Iamblichus on the same subject almost word for word. Iamblichus' enthusiastic adherence to the *Orphica*, the *Hermetica*, and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, along with the theurgy that was inseparable from the latter, is well known. If Iamblichus and Simplicius did not cite these texts, it is because they thought such evocations had no place in commentaries on the *Categories*. Conversely, the commentaries on the *Phaedo* of both Olympiodorus, the student of Ammonius, and of Damascius, the last diadoch of the school of Athens, both invoke the *Chaldaean Oracles*, for instance: according to the Indices of Westerink's edition, Olympiodorus refers to them six times, Damascius five times, with each author citing different fragments. We can thus see that it is not, as P. Golitsis thinks, the fact of belonging or not belonging to the school of Athens that is responsible for the fact that an author does or does not quote these sacred texts, but rather the opportunity offered by the text being commented.[46]

46 Since Iamblichus, the Neoplatonists attributed to each treatise or dialogue being commented a unique goal (σκοπός) which was defined in the introduction, and to which the interpretation had to conform.

Another topic of discussion is Ammonius' attitude toward Plato. From the mere fact that we possess only a single written commentary (*In De interpretatione*) by Ammonius, as well as the notes of his students taken at his courses on treatises by Aristotle, one must obviously not conclude that he had deliberately avoided commenting on Plato's dialogues. Several texts by Damascius, among other indications, moreover, prove the contrary. First, Damascius (as summarized by Photius) informs us that among his philosophy teachers was Ammonius, who "was far superior to his contemporaries in philosophy, and especially in the mathematical sciences. It is he [...] who explained Plato's writings to him, and the astronomical works of Ptolemy".[47] Elsewhere in his *Life of Isidorus*, Damascius gives us the following information about Ammonius:[48]

> Ammonius was a very hard worker (φιλοπονώτατος γέγονε), and was the most useful[49] among the exegetes of all times, but he had more (μᾶλλον) recourse to the works of Aristotle. In geometry and astronomy he was superior not only to his contemporaries, but also to those of Proclus' companions who were older than he, and I would almost say, to the men of all times.

From these two texts, one should therefore keep in mind that Ammonius taught both the philosophy of Plato and of Aristotle, that his exegesis of the two authors was of a very high level, that he had more (but not "especially", as this passage is sometimes translated) recourse to Aristotle than to Plato, and that he was even more excellent in geometry and astronomy. Finally, we possess a few commentaries on Platonic dialogues by his student Olympiodorus that are not substantially different from those by Damascius. What is more, the research of C. Viano on the fourth book of Olympiodorus' commentary on Aristotle's *Meteorologica*, as well as on alchemical works, have made it more than likely that this same Olympiodorus is identical with Olympiodorus the alchemist, author of a commentary on a work by the alchemist Zosimus, thereby manifesting his close links with Hermeticism.[50]

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47 Photius, *Library*, codex 181, vol. II, p. 192 Henry (= *Damascius, The Philosophical History*, testim. III, p. 340 Athanassiadi).

48 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 57 C Athanassiadi.

49 Like P. Athanassiadi, I adopt the correction πλεῖστον instead of πλείστους, suggested by Augusto Guida with reference to Galen XV, 519,1 and XVI, 589,2.

50 Cf. Cr. Viano forthcoming, "Le commentaire d'Olympiodore l'alchimiste: un puzzle cohérent? Considérations sur l'identité d'Olympiodore l'alchimiste et sur la structure de son commentaire sur le *Kat'energeian* de Zosime", and Cr. Viano forthcoming "Le livre IV des

We can therefore say, basing ourselves on Damascius and in the absence of other indications, that Ammonius himself probably had a preference for the works of Aristotle (but never to the point of omitting the explanation of Plato's works). It is also possible, however, that lessons on Aristote were more in demand among students, who also included Christians. With regard to Olympiodorus, however, by whom we possess commentaries on Aristotle and on Plato, we cannot, owing to a lack of biographical elements, say anything objective about his preferences, either in one sense or the other, and this also holds true for Asclepius, Elias, and David. As we shall see later on, however,[51] all these philosophers, including Ammonius, conceived of the Aristotelian *cursus* as a preparation for the Platonic *cursus*, and not as a subject of study sufficient in itself.

It has also been thought that his very intellectual constitution deprived Ammonius of the qualities necessary to be a good interpreter of Plato, the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the *Orphica*. Thus, the following texts by his student Olympiodorus have been taken as proof that Ammonius refused to accept the role of the supernatural in human life, and as a sign of his extreme rationalism:

> Nowadays at the time of eclipses people think that the *magi* are drawing down the moon. So too long ago it was believed that the Thessalian women said certain things, and they say that if ever they had the power to draw it down, they achieved the object of their aspiration; whereas if they were powerless to draw it down, they perished root and branch, themselves, their children, their husbands and their cities. [...] Observe, that we should not trust these childish tales about [women] drawing down the moon—it is just an eclipse, but the majority of people are deceived by it. In much the same way, even to the present day, they say that in Egypt there are wizards who make men into crocodiles and asses, or change them into whatever shape they want, and we should not believe it. Hence the philosopher Ammonius said to us in this exegesis: 'This superstition won me over, and when I was boy I thought that it was true'.[52]

Météorologiques, le commentaire d'Olympiodore et la tradition alchimique gréco-alexandrine".—On the links between the practice of alchemy and Hermeticism, cf., *inter alia*, J.-P. Mahé 2009, "Sciences occultes et exercices spirituels".

51 Cf. below, p. 64 (Porphyry); pp. 76–77 (Eugenius); p. 103 (Syrianus-Proclus); p. 144 (at the bottom) f.

52 Olympiodore *In Gorg*., p. 198, 24–199,10 Westerink, cited in the translation by R. Jackson–K. Lycos–H. Tarrant 1998, p. 251 f.

However, the reader will easily be persuaded, I think, that in this text Ammonius does not reject Neoplatonic theurgy, but only popular superstition, incompatible with the astronomical knowledge of his time. Since Ammonius was himself an astronomer, he could not help but know that eclipses had been known in Greece since the sixth century before our era, and that astronomers were capable of predicting them in advance. Likewise, the fact of knowing the true nature of eclipses does not prevent astronomers of our time from being Catholic, Jewish, or Muslims, and they are not necessarily agnostic. In the quoted text, moreover, Olympiodorus clearly approves of what Ammonius says, and thus should also refuse to accept the role of the supernatural in our life, although he cites the *Chaldaean Oracles* in his commentaries on Plato. In this text by Ammonius, there is neither a rejection of the supernatural and of theurgy, nor a sign of extreme rationalism: he is simply speaking as an astronomer. Not can one speak of extreme rationalism on Ammonius' part because he refuses to believe that Egyptian sorcerers can change a man into a crocodile or an ass.

Here is the second text supposed to prove Ammonius' extreme rationalism:

> Concerning Aristotle we must point out that in the first place he in no way disagrees with Plato, except in appearance. In the second place, even if he does disagree, that is because he has benefited from Plato. For [Plato] says in the *Alcibiades* 'Unless you hear yourself speaking, do not put your trust in the words of another'. And again in the *Phaedo* he says 'Care little for Socrates, but greatly for the truth' [*Alc*. 114e, *Phd*. 91c]. So Plato himself urges us not to believe him indiscriminately, but to inquire [for ourselves]. That is surely why the philosopher Ammonius says 'Even if it were to commit a bad act, I will nevertheless answer someone saying and affirming "Plato said so" that he did not say it in that way, and even—may Plato forgive me!—if he had said it in that way, I would not follow him without proof'.[53]

From the first sentence of this quotation, it emerges that the author—like all the members of the school of Ammonius, moreover—adheres to the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, a tendency which, as we shall see, reigned, with ups and downs, throughout the history of Neoplatonism form Porphyry to Simplicius, without any known exception. Let us

53 Olympiodore, *In Gorg*., p. 214,13–25 Westerink, cited in the translation, modified near the end, by R. Jackson–K. Lycos–H. Tarrant 1998, p. 267.

add right away that, in his introduction to his lessons on Aristotle's *Categories* (in the chapter on the qualities of the exegete of Aristotle's works), the same Ammonius affirms the following: "[…] but the exegete […] must examine each question thoroughly and prefer, if need be, the truth to Aristotle".[54] We thus see that Ammonius wants to be critical not only toward Plato, but also toward Aristotle. We will speak later[55] of the real meaning of this apparent objectivity, which is none other than that of a representative of the harmonizing tendency.

It should be noted that the quotations from the *Alcibiades* and the *Phaedo* that are present in the text by Olympiodorus are also found in two *Lives of Aristotle*, the *Vita Marciana* and the *Life of Aristotle*, with in addition a quotation from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,[56] to which Ammonius is certainly alluding here, and which Philoponus tells us was famous.[57] David (Elias) mentions the same three quotations in his commentary on the *Categories*:[58] it was therefore a commonplace, that says nothing about the degree of rationality of the person citing it.

The only criticism, massive it is true, that Damascius addressed to Ammonius concerns the latter's attitude toward the end of the persecutions of the pagans at Alexandria, which had followed the quarrels between pagans and Christians in the school of Horapollo and the revolt of Illus (484–488). Damascius first speaks of a certain Nicomedes, sent from the court of Constantinople to investigate the pagans, who wanted to arrest a certain Harpocras, a grammarian very close (συνήθης) to Ammonius, because he had heard that this grammarian was aware of what was happening around Ammonius (ὃν ἀκούσας … τὰ ἀμφὶ

54 Ammonius, *In Cat.*, p. 8,17 ff.

55 Cf. below, pp. 141–143.

56 According to the *communis opinio*, the *Vita Marciana*, together with the *Life of Aristotle* which the Neoplatonists read before studying the *Categories*, go back to a common model. The text of the *Vita Marciana* reads as follows: "We will say that Aristotle imitates Plato, even in those passages where he contradicts him. Indeed, it is Plato himself who says that one must have little concern for Socrates, but a great deal for the truth (*Phaedo*, 91c,1–2)". There follows a quotation from the *Crito* (46b,7–9) and the aforementioned quotation from the *First Alcibiades* (114e,7–9); and the text continues: "But perhaps he is not fighting against the opinions of Plato, but against those who interpret them badly, for instance with regard to the eternity of the world in the *De caelo*, for there are some who think there is [*scil.* in Plato] a temporal beginning, not a causal one. … And Aristotle is of a moderate character, for he says … in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: 'The man [*scil.* Plato] is dear to us, truth is also dear, but since both are dear to us, our sacred duty is to prefer the truth' ".

57 Philoponus, *De aetern. mundi contra Proclum*, v1,8, pp. 144,16–145,7 Rabe. L. Tarán 1984 has traced the history of this saying.

58 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 122,4–5.

τὸν Ἀμμώνιον ἐπίστασθαι). Harpocras, however, had fled just in time.[59] No fragment of the *Life of Isidore* informs us of the precise reasons for this investigation, but one may suppose it was still linked, in some way, to the quarrels between Christian students in the school directed by Horapollo and the pagan teaching staff of this institution, namely Ammonius, Isidorus and Heraiscus, quarrels that are described by Zacharias Scholasticus in his *Life of Severus*,[60] or else to the general persecution of pagans as a result of the rebellion of Illus. Asclepiodotus was probably already absent at the time. Other fragments inform us of the fate of Horapollo and the teaching staff of his school, whom I have just named. Horapollo and Heraiscus were seized and tortured, but did not say a word about the place where their colleagues had taken shelter.[61] Isidorus, after hiding for a while in Alexandria with Damascius, who was still a rhetorician, managed to escape persecution by fleeing, first undertaking, with Damascius, an eight-month journey through Syria as far as Bostra in Arabia, and finally going to Athens. Asclepiodotus, by contrast, was absent from Alexandria for private reasons during this critical time. At the beginning, Ammonius probably went into hiding himself—why, otherwise, would Nicomedes have needed to search for Harpocras?—but he seems finally to have come out of hiding. Damascius reports this event in the following way:

> Ammonius, who was sordidly greedy and saw everything in terms of profit of any kind, came to an agreement (ὁμολογίας τίθεται) with the then overseer of the prevailing doctrine,[62]

that is, the Patriarch Peter Mongus.

This unflattering portrait of Ammonius must, however, be relativized by another passage from the *Life of Isidore*,[63] in which Damascius tells how Ammonius' mother Aidesia had been so generous to poor people that she bequeathed a debt-ridden life to her two sons. Unlike Isidorus, then, Ammonius did not have the financial means available to take flight by travelling for months far from Alexandria and then going to Athens, but he also had to face his creditors. And since the school of Horapollo no longer existed, and he probably had a family to support, his "extreme avarice" was very probably not a feature of his character, but the inevitable consequence of his sad financial situation.

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59 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 117 A Athanassiadi.

60 Zacharias Scholasticus, *Life of Severus*, pp. 14–23 Kugener; cf. above, p. 9 ff. with n. 31.

61 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 117 C Athanassiadi.

62 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 118 B Athanassiadi.

63 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), fr. 56 Athanassiadi.

Nevertheless, Ammonius, according to Damascius, had to make concessions to the Christian authorities who, judging by a fragment of the *Life of Isidorus*, had barred Neoplatonic philosophers from teaching.[64] And since the fragments of Damascius' *Life of Isidorus* do not tell us what these "concessions" were, a great deal of ink has been spilled on this subject. It was first thought that conversion to Christianity was the condition *sine qua non* for Ammonius to be able to resume his teaching. This hypothesis is scarcely defended today, and L. Cardullo[65] has recently summarized all the reasons that contradict it, basing herself on a penetrating analysis of the dialogue *Ammonius* by Zacharias Scholasticus, and of Asclepius' commentary ἀπὸ φωνῆς Ἀμμωνίου on the *Metaphysics*. At the same time, she proved definitively that the metaphysical doctrines of Asclepius-Ammonius did not contain significant differences as compared to those of Syrianus-Proclus (we shall often have occasion to return to her works in what follows, as well as to those, all of them excellent, of her colleagues at the University of Catania in Sicily). According to another supposition, Ammonius proposed to comment henceforth exclusively on treatises by Aristotle. In the fragments of his *Life of Isidorus* that we cited p. 15 ff., Damascius merely testifies to the fact that Ammonius had also taught Plato, but they contain no indication that he had ceased to do so as of a specific point in time. The echoes of Ammonius' oral Platonic teaching that are to be found in the corresponding commentaries of his student Olympiodorus (for instance, *In Gorg.*, pp. 164,5 ff. and 199, 8–10 Westerink) prove the contrary. Since Olympiodorus' life is generally dated between approximately 495 and 565, the courses mentioned by Olympiodorus must have taken place after this arrangement with the Christians. The most plausible supposition, in my opinion, is the one suggested by A. Sheppard,[66] among others: according to her, Ammonius agreed to

64 This is clearly stated with regard to Isidorus, but I think we have the right to generalize: Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*) fr. 116 E Athanassiadi, cited in the editor's translation: "No less than Socrates in the search for truth; for he too was not able to obey the command of the Thirty Tyrants who had ordered him not to hold discourse". Yet Isidorus, unlike Ammonius, had been able to flee with Damascius following this prohibition, as Damascius himself was later to flee Athens with his students after the edict of 529.

65 L. Cardullo 2011, "Creazionismo, eternalismo e causalità del primo principio. Platone, Aristotele e alcuni interpreti neoplatonici"; L. Cardullo 2009, "Una lettura neoplatonica di *Metaphysica Alpha*: gli scolii di Asclepio di Tralle trascritti 'dalla voce' di Ammonio"; L. Cardullo 2002, "Asclepio di Tralle: pensatore originale o mero redattore ἀπὸ φωνῆς?". Foundational in this context was the study by A. Madigan 1986, "Syrianus and Asclepius on Forms and Intermediates in Plato and Aristotle" (cf. below, p. 153 f.).

66 A. Sheppard 2000, "Philosophy and Philosophical Schools".

abstain from all theurgical practice, and from any allusion to it, as well as to the pagan cults and gods. We should recall that Zacharias the Scholastic had designated Isidorus and Asclepiodotus, two of Ammonius' colleagues at the school of Horapollo, as "magicians", that is, as theurgists (cf. above, p. 9 f.), and that shortly before, the last hidden cult site of Isis in Egypt had been destroyed at Menouthis-Abukir, accompanied by an immense anti-Pagan propaganda. Even before the scandal surrounding the school of Horapollo, however, instruction on the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the *Orphica* could certainly never have taken place in that school, for it was attended by Christian students, and as is attested by fragment 88 A Athanassiadi, the Neoplatonic philosophers forbade themselves, in general, from giving public courses on such secret subjects, which were comparable to ancient mysteries, and therefore forbidden to the non-initiated. The *Life of Proclus* by Marinus demonstrates that such instruction could be received only in a strictly private context by rare, select disciples, who had accomplished the two complete cycles of Neoplatonic studies.[67] The concession demanded of Ammonius thus would have essentially concerned his personal renunciation of theurgical practices—at least in public—and pagan cults.[68] In any case, what may have contributed most to the rehabilitation of Ammonius is the fact that according to Damascius,[69] he was a mathematician and astronomer of exceptional quality, who was probably irreplaceable.

As far as Olympiodorus is concerned, Ph. Hoffmann[70] has recently pointed out a very interesting example of the awkwardness which the Christian environment inflicted upon this philosopher's teaching. I quote him: "It should

67 Marinus, *Vita Procli*, § 26 ff. The existence of such subjects should not even be mentioned to beginners; Ammonius, *In Porphyr. Isagog.*, p. 13,8–10 Busse: in his division of the parts of philosophy, Ammonius refuses to speak of the subdivisions of the theological part, one of which, as J. Bouffartigue quite rightly remarks (1992, p. 557), was telestic and mystical philosophy, "for they are not made for ears that are still at an introductory stage".—In I. Hadot 2002a, "Die Stellung des Neuplatonikers Simplikios zum Verhältnis der Philosophie zu Religion und Theurgie", I reported on the positions of Iamblichus, Hierocles, Proclus, Damascius and Simplicius, concerning the relation between philosophy, religion, and theurgy. This text was partially adapted in I. et P. Hadot 2004, *Apprendre à philosopher* …, pp. 187–211. Cf. also on Iamblichus A. Smith 2002, "Further thoughts on Iamblichus …", especially pp. 300–302, and, on Porphyry, Ph. Hoffmann 2010, "Erôs, Pistis … et Elpis: Tétrade chaldaïque, triade néoplatonicienne", p. 268 ff.

68 This was also the opinion of R. Sorabji 1990, "The ancient commentators on Aristotle", p. 12. His article from 2005, "Divine names and sordid deals in Ammonius' Alexandria", adopts another angle. It will be discussed later, pp. 28–38.

69 Cf. fr. 57 C Athanassiadi, cited above pp. 15 f.

70 Ph. Hoffmann 2012, "Un grief anti-Chretien chez Proclus: L'ignorance en théologie", p. 174 f.

be noted, moreover, that a … passage from the commentary by Olympiodorus dealing with sensitive subjects, the demon of Socrates and 'demons that have received us by lot' …, explicitly expresses requisites for prudence that are dictated by his environment. With Socrates' fate in mind, Olympiodorus resolves to deliver interpretations 'that are appropriate to present circumstances' (συμβιβαστικῶς τοῖς παροῦσι), that is, that do not shock his Christian auditors, the expression τὰ παρόντα being an example of a coded phrase … to designate the present state of affairs under the *Christian Empire*. The 'demons', he explains, are in fact well known 'in the common religious practice' …, which is that of the surrounding, that is, Christian society, but they are designated by another name: that of 'angel' (ἄγγελος).[71] After mentioning the distinction between angels, demons, and heroes (according to the Chaldeans), and then recalling the doctrines of Plato and Orpheus on Eros, Olympiodorus then takes great care to say that this is the interpretation of the 'Exegetes', that is, of his pagan predecessors (doubtless Proclus and Damascius), and he distinguishes from these pagan doctrines his own interpretation (the personal demon is the 'conscience', τὸ συνειδός)".

When evoking the atmosphere of Alexandria, one sometimes emphasizes the influence that the "exact sciences" studied at the Museum of Alexandria until the disappearance of this institution may have exerted on the intellectual milieu of this city: this scientific atmosphere supposedly incited the philosophers to prefer Aristotle after Plato. Apart from the fact that there exists no piece of evidence in favor of this preference, as we have seen and as we shall see in what follows, this view of matters neglects the fact that in Antiquity, scientific research generally found its place in the context of the Peripatetic, Stoic, and (especially for mathematics, astronomy and astrology) Platonic philosophical schools, and that, for instance, the great later mathematicians, astronomers and astrologers such as Ptolemy, Pappus, and Theon (the father of Hypatia), of whom we have spoken above,[72] all had links with Platonism.[73]

If one leaves aside the constraint exerted by Christians on pagans, beginning with the end of the 5th century, and the consequences it had for teaching—a constraint that was much stronger at Alexandria than at Athens—, the only

71 Olympiodore, *In Alc.*,21,15 ff. Creuzer (Westerink, p. 16)

72 Cf. above, p. 5 ff.

73 Cf. I. Hadot 1998, "Les aspects sociaux et institutionnels des sciences et de la médecine dans l'Antiquité tardive".

difference between the teaching of Neoplatonic philosophy at Athens and the teaching delivered at Alexandria consists, in my opinion, in its organization. The members of the school of Athens, founded by Plutarch of Athens around 400, formed a private community that lived off its own revenue, deriving primarily from donations. The patrimony of these Neoplatonists produced a considerable annual income, so that the professors did not depend on honoraria paid by their students, unlike what happened in Alexandria. The school's directors were called "diadochs" of Plato, not because they were his real successors and heirs, but because they claimed the Master's spiritual heritage for themselves. This school disappeared in 529 with the edict of Justinian, since Damascius, the last diadoch, fled to Persia with his students.[74] The teachers of what is called the "School of Alexandria", by contrast, did not live in a community with their students, and it is an anachronism to say that they occupied a "chair in philosophy" subsidized by the city. At most, one can use the term "chair" for the imperial foundation by Marcus Aurelius in 176, which created stable, renewable positions at Athens for the teaching of Platonic, Stoic, Peripatetic, and Epicurean philosophy. Beginning with Antoninus Pius, however, what imperial legislation envisaged in general for the various towns of the Roman empire has nothing to do with our modern university chairs. The towns had the right to hire a certain number of grammarians, rhetoricians, and philosophers (whose number depended on the town's importance), with remuneration generally consisting in a few privileges, such as exemption from taxes and shelter, and a fixed annual salary, to which was added the honorarium that the teacher had the right to demand from each of the students. Obviously, however, in the big cities there existed, in addition to the public school teachers, a host of private schools which subsisted as well as they could.[75] Because of strong tensions between Christians—who were in a position of strength at Alexandria in the time of Ammonius—and pagans, it is hard for me to believe that pagan philosophers could still have been hired and paid by the city. The famous Museum of Alexandria, long subsidized by the emperors, no longer

74 For some hypotheses on the destiny of these philosophers after their stay in Persia, cf. I. Hadot 2007a, "Dans quel lieu le néoplatonicien Simplicius a-t-il fondé son école de mathématiques, et où a pu avoir lieu son entretien avec un manichéen?", I. Hadot 2007b, "Remarque complémentaire …" and I. Hadot 2014, *Le néoplatonicien Simplicius à la lumière des recherches contemporaines* …, pp. 14–134.

75 On imperial legislation concerning professors, cf. I. Hadot 2005a, *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique. Contribution à l'histoire de l'éducation et de la culture dans l'Antiquité*, Cf. also I. Hadot, 2005b.

existed, but above all, the description that Zacharias Scholasticus gives in his *Life of Severus* of the school of Horapollo, in which he himself had attended classes as a Christian, is that of a large private school,[76] made up at least of grammarians and philosophers. Those whom he names were all Neoplatonists: Heraiscus (cf. above, pp. 9 and 11 ff.), the uncle of Horapollo the Younger, Asclepiodotus, the disciple of Proclus (cf. above, p. 9 f.), Ammonius, the disciple of Proclus, Isidorus, disciple of Proclus (cf. above, p. 9 ff.). Yet there were probably also rhetoricians. The school was led by the pagan grammarian Horapollo the Younger, which means that it was he who had provided the building and rented classrooms to other teachers. Zacharias only mentions him in his capacity as a grammarian, although he also seems to have taught philosophy, as we shall see. We also learn an interesting detail: the philosophers, like Horapollo, always taught on Fridays in this school, "the day on which all the other professors had the custom of teaching and explaining at home". Did Zacharias mean that the pagan philosophers, as well as the pagan grammarian Horapollo, taught classes in this school *only* on Fridays, or are we to understand that they were the only ones to work there *also* on Fridays, when the other professors (Christians?) taught their classes at home? In any case, Ammonius' role in the private school is clear: instead of occupying a unique "municipal chair" at Alexandria, as the *communis opinio* claims, he shared the philosophical teaching dispensed in this school with at least three other pagan teachers. In a petition by the same Horapollo the Younger, who is mentioned by Zacharias, and who designates himself here as "most renowned philosopher",[77] Horapollo declares, moreover, that he attended several "Academies" and "Museums" in Alexandria before 493, which proves the plurality of private institutions in that city. Given that Ammonius' teachings were of a purely private nature since before the persecution of the pagans, it seems to me completely excluded that he might have been hired long-term by the city of Alexandria at a time when he had to make concessions in order to continue to teach. To conclude, without any element of proof, from Elias (who mentions Eutocius), or from a remark by David — David says in his commentary on the *Analytics*, preserved in an Armenian translation, that he was the student of Eutocius (who, according to other sources, had dedicated a book to Ammonius), and of Olympiodorus (who, according to his own testimony was a student of Ammonius) —

76 Zacharias the Scholastic, *Vie de Sévère*, ed. and transl. by M.A. Kugener, *PO* 2 (1904), pp. 16–23.

77 *PCairo* III 67295 (a papyrus dated around 493), edited and translated by J. Maspero, "Horapollon et la fin du paganisme égyptien", *BIAO* 11, 1914, pp. 163–195.

that these three philosophers, Ammonius, Eutocius, and Olympiodorus, succeeded one another in a public "chair" of philosophy[78] seems to me to be quite risky.

I conclude, therefore, that throughout its history, the Alexandrian milieu resembled that of Athens very closely, and was linked to it by permanent teacher-student relations. We have been able to observe that such sacred texts as the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the *Orphica* and the *Hermetica* were practiced on both sides throughout the history of the two schools, as were theurgy and pagan cults. Only the organization of the teaching of Neoplatonic philosophy was different in the two cities. If one can rightly speak of a "school of Athens" because of its community character and the uninterrupted succession of its diadochs in the context of this private and financially independent institution, at Alexandria one should rather speak of schools in the plural, each philosopher providing his instruction either alone, or grouped together with other philosophers, living, in any case, if he had no personal fortune, off the salary received from his students. It is possible that, prior to around 450, there were also Neoplatonists hired by the city of Alexandria—this is attested for Hermias, the father of Ammonius. Yet although it is true that some may have been members of the famous Museum, like Theon, father of Hypatia (cf. above, pp. 5, 8 and 22), for Ammonius himself, by contrast, the account of Zacharias the Scholastic proves the strictly private nature of his teaching for the period prior to around 485, and therefore makes it unlikely, owing to the hostility of the Christians, that one of the Neoplatonic philosophers teaching at Alexandria could have been hired by the city.

This very different status of the Neoplatonic teachers of Alexandria and Athens had consequences: the fact of not being financially independent, as the Neoplatonic teachers of Athens were, and of not being able, for this reason, to limit themselves to dispensing their teaching behind closed doors, in front of a restricted circle of chosen students, made the Neoplatonic teachers of Alexandria, from the end of the 5th century, much more vulnerable than their Athenian colleagues to the growing power of the Christians.

78 Cf. L.G. Westerink 1961, p. 131 and id. 1990, p. xvff.

2 The Opinions of K. Verrycken, R. Sorabji, and L. Cardullo on the Subject of the Doctrinal Position of Ammonius, Son of Hermias, and on the Harmonizing Tendency

We shall find the same resemblance between the Neoplatonic schools of Athens and Alexandria at the turn of the 5th and 6th centuries by examining the history of their doctrines. Let us first summarize very quickly the opinion of K. Verrycken. In his article "The metaphysics of Ammonius son of Hermeias",[79] which represents very great progress as compared to the work of Praechter concerning the school of Ammonius, he accepted most of the results obtained in my research on the Alexandrian school.[80] He agreed in saying (p. 227) that in the commentaries by Ammonius that dealt with Aristotle's *Organon*, the simplified presentation of the Neoplatonic philosophical system corresponded, as in Simplicius' commentary on the *Manual of Epictetus* and that of Hierocles on the *Carmen aureum*, to the propaedeutic nature of these works. He was also of the opinion that Ammonius admitted the existence of the Neoplatonic One (p. 205), and that his philosophical system must have been, to a certain extent, in agreement with that of Syrianus and Proclus (p. 206). On the other hand, Verrycken thought that Ammonius' commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (approximately available to us in the class notes of his student Asclepius), since it dealt with metaphysics, should have developed the philosophical system of his teacher Proclus in all its details (p. 228). Since this was not the case, Verrycken concluded that either Ammonius had partly abandoned Proclus' system, or else that he simply did not wish to develop it, since he had a preference for Aristotelian studies (bottom of p. 230), and did not believe in the superiority of the philosophy of Plato.

To this argument I will briefly reply here, and then in more detail in the course of the present study, first, that neither Verrycken nor those philosophers and historians of philosophy who have followed his lead have taken sufficiently into account the fact that the Aristotelian cycle of the Neoplatonic *cursus* was never anything other than an introduction to the Platonic cycle, a fact that all by itself implies the superiority (but not the infallibility) of the philosophy of Plato. This superiority was, moreover, explicitly admitted by Ammonius and his school (that is, by Philoponus, Olympiodorus, and the latter's students Elias and David), as well as by Simplicius.[81] As far as the *Metaphysics* is concerned,

79 K. Verrycken 1990 a.

80 K. Verrycken 1990 a, p. 226, concerning I. Hadot 1978, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin—Hiéroclès et Simplicius*.

81 Cf. below, p. 143 ff.

its goal (σκοπός), according to the general introduction of the commentary on this treatise by Asclepius-Ammonius, is to speak of "all beings insofar as they are beings",[82] which excludes, at the same time, the entire divine hierarchy beyond being, and therefore the ὑπερούσιοι such as the One, the henads, etc.. Even if it is said in this context that when Aristotle speaks of completely immobile beings, this is a matter of theology, one must always bear in mind what is affirmed by the Neoplatonists contemporary with Asclepius-Ammonius on the subject of the great difference that exists between the theologies of Aristotle and of Plato: "Aristotle, when he does theology, always remains a philosopher of nature, in the same way as Plato, conversely, when he does research on the philosophy of nature, always remains a theologian …".[83] With regard to the *skopos*, since Iamblichus, its definition, obligatory in the introductions of the commentaries on the treatises of Aristotle and the dialogues of Plato, served to fix the broad outlines of the discussion. In the present case, this generally limited discussion to the ontological level of beings, and prohibited the *systematic* display of entities surpassing this level, as for instance the Ineffable of Damascius, the One, and the Monad and the Dyad of unlimited power of Syrianus, etc. I say "generally", for there are books M and N and the second part of book A of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle openly attacks some fundamental Pythagorico-Platonic dogmas concerning the Ideas and the Idea-Numbers, and in this context it became inevitable for any Neoplatonist to mention occasionally, while defending themselves, certain details of their own theology that transcended the level of beings: this is what Syrianus does, as do Asclepius-Ammonius. We have the commentaries of Syrianus on books M and N, as well as those on books B and Γ, but by Asclepius-Ammonius only the commentaries on books A–Z have been preserved. Except for the case of books B and Γ, this deprives us of the possibility to carry out point-by-point comparisons between these two commentaries. Having neglected this last viewpoint, as well as the methodological indications of Asclepius-Ammonius, both in the general introduction and in the introductions to each of the books of the *Metaphysics* being commented, Verrycken was prevented from seeing that for the Neoplatonists,

82 Asclepius, *In Metaph.*, p. 2,10–11 Hayduck. Let us compare the goal of Plato's *Parmenides* according to Proclus (*In Parm.*, 641,1–14): the complete representation of all beings insofar as they come forth from the One, and are deified.

83 Cf. below, p. 52 f., p. 96 note 124 and p. 133 f. with notes 250 and 251, the quotations of texts from David (Elias) and Simplicius.—One of the very rare cases in which I find myself disagreeing slightly with L. Cardullo concerns precisely the role that the theology of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* played in the opinion of Ammonius-Asclepius: unlike me, L. Cardullo 2009, p. 251 thinks that Ammonius-Asclepius considered it to be equivalent to that of Plato.

it was not in a commentary of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that they should develop all the fine points of their theological system, but in a commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*.

In the commentary by Asclepius-Ammonius, Verrycken rightly observes a tendency toward the harmonization of the philosophy of Aristotle with that of Plato, a harmonization that culminates in the identification of Aristotle's Intellect with the Demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus*. He is mistaken, however, when he takes this tendency to be an innovation of Ammonius (pp. 229–331; cf. below, n. 314, p. 153), which he transmitted to all his students and the students of his students. Indeed, we already find in the Neoplatonist Themistius the doctrine that Aristotle's Intellect and prime mover was at the same time final cause and *causa efficiens*,[84] and we have some reason to suppose that Themistius was not the first to invent this equation. Ammonius thus did nothing other than take up an already ancient tradition of Neoplatonic interpretation that harmonized Plato and Aristotle, a tradition that was interrupted, with regard to this detail and a few others, but not in its totality, by Syrianus[85] and Proclus.

The article by R. Sorabji, entitled "Divine names and sordid deals in Ammonius' Alexandria",[86] bears some resemblances to the work of K. Verrycken, both in results and in method. Like Verrycken and most historians of philosophy, Sorabji thinks he can neglect all the indications that the Neoplatonists themselves strive to give concerning, *inter alia*, the goal (*skopos*)[87] or the reading order that the treatise to be commented envisages or occupies, whether it be in the preparatory cursus (the "lesser mysteries") of a fixed number of Aristotelian treatises, or in the reading curriculum of a fixed number of the dialogues of Plato (the "greater mysteries"). These pedagogical and methodological explanations that the ancient philosophers expounded at the beginning of each of their commentaries according to a determinate scheme in six points,[88] obvi-

84 See below, pp. 93 f.

85 Indeed, according to Syrianus, *In Metaph.*, pp. 10,35–11,5, Aristotle, abandoning the ancestral philosophy, does not concede that the immaterial kinds are efficient causes, but only final causes. Yet in Book Λ of the *Metaphysics*, still according to Syrianus, Aristotle clearly recognizes as the ultimate final cause, which excites desire, the highest one which, to the highest degree, contains its end within itself,—that is, the Neoplatonic One—but reduced to its final function (τοῦ γὰρ ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κατ' αὐτὸν πάντα ἐφίεται (a reference to Aristotle, *Eth. Nicom.* 1,1094a1)· εἰ δὲ καὶ πολλὰ τἀγαθά, ἀλλ' οὖν πάντα πρὸς τὰ κυριώτερα προστέτακται καὶ ταῦτα πρὸς ἓν τὸ ὑπέρτατον καὶ τελικώτατον τῶν ἁπάντων, ὡς ἐν τῷ Λ σαφῶς ἔστιν αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ἀκούειν.)

86 R. Sorabji 2005.

87 On the exegetical function of the *skopos*, cf. below, note 38, p. 66.

88 On the Neoplatonic introductory schemes, cf. I. Hadot 1991 and I. Hadot *et alii* 1990.

ously do not have the good fortune of interesting their modern colleagues, who usually hasten straight to the commentary properly so called, and consequently miss crucial information concerning the interpretation of the commentary in question. The example already encountered above is that of K. Verrycken and his misunderstanding on the subject of the goal (*skopos*) that Asclepius assigns to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

As he himself states in the article I have just mentioned, R. Sorabji wishes first to show that the arrangement between Ammonius and the Christian church, of which Damascius speaks, and which we mentioned above (p. 19 ff.), had consisted in obliging Ammonius to abstain from all theurgical practice, as well as from any allusion to it, and to the practice of pagan cults in his teaching. This is indeed the most plausible explanation, as we observed above. R. Sorabji thinks he finds a supplementary argument in favor of this hypothesis with the help of a comparison between Ammonius' commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione* and Proclus' commentary on the Platonic dialogue *Cratylus*. He notes that Proclus allots a great deal of space in his commentary to the interpretation of the meaning and force of divine names, a subject that is completely absent from Ammonius' commentary, and Sorabji interprets this fact as the sign of Ammonius' deliberate reserve on this subject. Yet if one takes into consideration what Ammonius and Proclus say about the goal (*skopos* or *prothesis*) of the *De interpretatione*, on the one hand, and of the *Cratylus* on the other, one reaches a completely different result. Here is part of the very long definition of the goal of the *De interpretatione* by Ammonius, who at the same time emphasizes the importance of this definition for the interpretation of Aristotle's entire logical corpus:[89]

> So what is this purpose [πρόθεσις]? **This must be defined before the rest, and everything which comes after this must be related to it.**[90] In order

89 Ammonius, *In De interpr.*, pp. 1,21–4,16 Busse, cited in the translation by D. Blank 1996, *Ammonius On Aristotle On Interpretation* 1–8, p. 11 ff. (slightly modified). Aristotle's logical corpus, by which the Neoplatonists' Aristotelian cycle—itself conceived as a preparation for the Platonic cycle—began, is as follows in the order of reading: *Categories*, (simple vocal sounds), *De interpretatione*, (simple sentences of the assertoric kind), *Prior Analytics and Posterior Analytics* (simple assertoric sentences as parts of syllogisms). On the introductions to the Neoplatonic commentaries in general, cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, where the Introductions of the 6 commentaries that exist on the *Categories* are analysed in detail.

90 Concerning the importance of formulating the goal of the treatise to be commented, cf. *inter alia* David, (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 127, 6 ff. (cited after the translation of Ph. Hoffmann 1997, p. 90: "One must seek for the goal even when it is [clearly] stated by the title, because all

to grasp it in an orderly manner, we must remember what was said in the preface to our reading of the *Categories*: the course on logic [ἡ λογική πραγματεία] has at its end [τέλος] the discovery [εὕρεσις] of demonstration [ἀπόδειξις]. Preceding this is the understanding of the simple syllogism, which in turn begins with the theory of the simple sentences which compose the syllogism, which in turn begins with the comprehension of all the types of simple vocal sounds [φωναί] out of which the simple sentence has its origin. Therefore, once Aristotle has given his course on simple vocal sounds in his book of the *Categories*, in this book he sets himself the task [προτίθεται] of giving us the simple sentences which are completed out of the interweaving of the simple vocal sounds and which, since they are proposed by those who want to perform some syllogistic reasoning to their partners in reasoning, are called 'propositions' [προτάσεις]. However, there are five kinds of sentences [πέντε εἴδη τῶν λόγων], namely the Vocative, as in: 'O happy Son of Atreus', the Imperative, as in: 'Go! Away, swift Iris', the Interrogative, as in: 'Who and from where are you?', the Optative [εὐκτικός], as in: 'If only, Father Zeus …', and last of all the Assertoric [ἀποφαντικός] by which we make an assertion about anything at all, for example: 'But gods know all things', 'All soul is immortal'. **Aristotle does not instruct us in this course about every simple sentence, but only about the Assertoric—and rightly so, for only this type of sentence is receptive of truth and falsity, and under this type fall demonstrations, for the sake of which the whole course in logic has been composed by the Philosopher** […] So, in brief, the purpose of the present course is to discuss the first composition of the simple vocal sounds, which occurs in the predicative form of the assertoric sentence. I specify 'first' because the composition of the simple vocal sounds also produces syllogisms, but that is not the *first* composition. Rather, it is the composition completed through the interweaving of the sentences which have come to be in the first composition. Therefore, he will examine these simple sentences in this course, considering them in and of themselves, just as assertions, and not as premises. In the *Analytics*, however, he will correctly consider that he should examine them by taking them as parts of syllogisms and at the same time as premises.

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the elements of the text converge toward the goal (*πάντα πρὸς τὸν σκοπὸν ἀφορᾷ …*". Cf. also below, note 38, p. 66.

Let us confront this text with the definition of the goal (*skopos*) of the dialogue *Cratylus* by Proclus (or rather by the excerptor of Proclus' commentary on the *Cratylus*, which has not been preserved for us in its original version) and of its place in the reading order of the dialogues included in the Platonic cursus (the "greater mysteries"):[91]

> 1. "The purpose [σκοπός] of the *Cratylus* is to describe the generative activity [γόνιμον ἐνέργειαν] of souls among the lowest entities [ἐν ἐσχάτοις] and the ability to produce likenesses, which souls, since they received it as a part of their essential lot, demonstrate through the correctness of names. Yet, since the divided activity of souls in many places fails of its proper ends [τῶν οἰκείων τελῶν], as does their divided nature, names that are undefined and circulate accidentally and by chance [τύχῃ καὶ αὐτομάτως] are also likely to occur. Not all are products of intellectual knowledge and aim for a close relationship with the objects that they signify.
>
> 2. The *Cratylus* is both logical and dialectical, not using the bare dialectical methods of the Peripatetic school, which are abstracted from the objects of analysis, but following the great Plato, because he knows that the dialectical technique is suited only to those who have been completely purified in thought, educated by mathematical studies, purified, through the virtues, of the immature aspect of their character, and, in short, after genuine philosophical study. For this dialectic is the 'coping stone of mathematical studies' (*Rep*. 534^{E}), elevates us to the one cause of all things, the Good, and is said by Plato 'to have come with the most brilliant fire from the gods to men by way of Prometheus' (*Phlb*. 16C). The analytical method of the Peripatetic school and its aim, deductive proof [ἀπόδειξις], is easily grasped and clear to all those who are not utterly whirled about in darkness and are too full of the Water of Forgetfulness. [...] 6. The present dialogue makes us understand the correctness of names, and one must, if one is going to be a dialectician, begin from this theoretical examination. [...] 8. **Plato now wishes to present the first principles of real entities** [τὰς ἀρχὰς τῶν ὄντων] **and of the art of dialectic, inasmuch as he is presenting the names together with the things of which they are names**."

91 Proclus, *In Cratyl*., 1–8, p. 1 Pasquali, cited in the translation, slightly modified, by B. Duvick 2007, *Proclus On Plato, Cratylus*, p. 11.

The difference between the goals that Ammonius and Proclus attribute to Aristotle's *De interpretatione* and to Plato's dialogue *Cratylus* respectively, leaps to the eye, and this difference in goals is closely linked to the place in the order of Neoplatonic studies that the two authors assign to the two works on which they are commenting. In the preparatory Aristotelian cycle, which was itself divided into three levels, according to the ontological level of the content of the treatises to be studied,[92] the *De interpretatione* occupies the second place in the first stage that includes the "instrumental writings", that is, the logical treatises, and is therefore intended for beginners. The *Cratylus*, in contrast, is situated in the fourth place of the Platonic cycle, and was therefore addressed to much more advanced students, for one had to go through the two cycles one after the other and step by step, moving from the the more simple to the more difficult, "without skipping any stage".[93] According to Ammonius, then, the subject of the *De interpretatione* is limited to the declarative statement and its elements: noun and verb, other kinds of simple statements such as prayers (in the optative) being expressly excluded. Indeed, as Ammonius says,[94] the declarative statement is the only species of statement susceptible of truth and falsehood, the species under which demonstrations are ranged, and it was with a view to demonstrations that the philosopher composed the whole of logic. From the eminently didactic viewpoint of the Neoplatonists, the commentary must therefore not go beyond that level. According to Proclus, the *Cratylus*, in contrast, already teaches the first principles of beings (although they are viewed from a specific angle), a subject which pertains to theology. To the difference in subjects corresponds, says Proclus, a difference in the form of instruction: the analytic Aristotelian method in the case of the *De interpretatione*, accessible to all and sundry according to Proclus, and in the case of the *Cratylus*, Platonic dialectic, which raises us up as far as the first principle of all principles, the Good, and which can be approached only by those who have been previously purified by the virtues, by the study of the four mathematical sciences, and who have already made considerable progress in the study of

92 The three stages are, in order: "instrumental writings" (logical corpus), "practical writings" (political and ethical writings), and "theoretical writings" (going from the *Physics* to the *Metaphysics*, while explicitly excluding the zoological, botanical, and exoteric writings). For an overview of this Neoplatonic division of the works of Aristotle, see the table in I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, p. 65 and pp. 80–93.

93 οὐχ ὑπερβάθμιον πόδα τείνοντα: in this context, the Neoplatonists like to refer to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, as for instance Marinus, *Proclus ou Sur le Bonheur*, 13, p. 16,6–7 Saffrey-Segonds.

94 Cf. Ammonius, *In De interpr.*, p. 5, 14–17 Busse.

true philosophy. Consequently, names are presented together with the realities of which they are the names, and thus divine names with the corresponding gods.

Contrary to what R. Sorabji thinks, it is thus completely natural that Ammonius, in his commentary on the *De interpretatione*, does not expatiate upon the efficacy of divine names in prayers,[95] a subject that comes close to theurgy and by no means corresponds to the level of a pupil studying the *De interpretatione*. This fact does not allow us to draw any conclusion other than that Ammonius conformed to the didactic rules proper to the Neoplatonists. I am even convinced that Proclus himself had not proceeded differently in his lessons on the *De interpretatione*, which have gone lost to us, but of which Ammonius says he preserved the memory when writing his own commentary.[96] We do not know, moreover, whether Ammonius had written his commentary before or after the beginning of the persecutions. In any case, its content by no means prevent a dating prior to these events and to the arrangement with the Church.

A few more comments on the history of Neoplatonic commentaries on the *De interpretatione*. The first commentary on this subject was composed by Porphyry. It has not been preserved, but was used as primary source by Boethius,[97] who was slightly younger than Ammonius, in the second and more ample edition of his commentary on the *De interpretatione*. Boethius also makes use of the commentary by Alexander of Aphrodisias, probably through

95 More precisely, Sorabji thinks that Ammonius should have developed this theme in response to a certain Dusareios, who wanted to question whether names are by institution (θέσει) by adducing prayers and curses, in which our names, hence human names, clearly act for good or evil on those who bear them (Ammonius, *In De interpr*., p. 38, 23 ff. Busse). Since even Proclus was of the opinion that human proper names given by parents, (such as Athanasius, expressing hope, or, like other names given in memory of an ancestor), are not 'by nature' and therefore have no divine cause (cf. Proclus, *In Cratyl*., 123, p. 72 *ad finem* Pasquali), Ammonius had no reason to launch himself here into a discussion of the force of prayers, a discussion that was totally alien to the subject of the *De interpretatione*.

96 Cf. A. Sheppard 1987, "Proclus' philosophical method of exegesis: the use of Aristotle and the Stoics in the commentary on the *Cratylus*", p. 143: "I suspect that Proclus' lectures on the De int. were no more and no less sympathetic to Aristotle than is the extant commentary of Ammonius."

97 Cf. Boethius, *In De interpret*., p. 7,5 Meiser II, cited in the translation by A. Smith 2010, *Boethius, On Aristotle on interpretation*, p. 17: "We have arranged our explication of this work in Latin following Porphyry as far as possible, although we have included material from others too. For Porphyry, our guide, seems pro-eminent in intellectual sharpness and ability to marshal his ideas".

the intermediary of Porphyry's commentary. He also knows a commentary by Syrianus on the same subject, but he does not much appreciate it, and prefers the one by Porphyry. In all Boethius' criticisms of Syrianus, the points at issue are purely logical ones alone. With regard to Aristotle's assertion that no name is by nature,[98] Boethius, probably following Porphyry, feels no need to raise the question of whether Aristotle is here contradicting the Socrates of Plato's *Cratylus*, unlike Ammonius. The latter begins his long, harmonizing interpretation of this phrase by these words:[99]

> Here it is worth asking how, when Socrates in the *Cratylus* argues against Hermogenes' assertion that names are by imposition (θέσει) and shows that they are by nature (φύσει), Aristotle can insist in these words that no name is by nature. It must be said that 'by nature' is said in two ways by those who count names as by nature, and similarly 'by imposition' is said in two ways by those positing that they are by imposition.

At the end of his demonstration, he arrives at the conclusion that the second meaning of "by imposition" coincides with the second meaning of "by nature", that Socrates' answer to Hermogenes in the *Cratylus* falls within this play of double meanings, and that the Aristotelian phrase in question must be understood in an analogous way:[100]

> Nor does Aristotle prescribe any differently from this when he says here that no name is 'by nature'. For he denies of them the sense of 'by nature' which the Heracliteans were advocating, just as Plato did, and he would not have declined to call them 'by nature' in the same sense as the divine Plato does.

The traces of an argumentation parallel to that of Ammonius are found in Proclus' *In Cratylum* (or rather in the excerptor's notes), as A. Sheppard has well demonstrated.[101] She also insists on the fact that here, as in a few other places,

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98 Aristotle, *De interpret.*, 16a27.

99 Ammonius, *In De interpret.*, p. 34,17 ff. Busse, cited in the translation by D. Blank 1996, p. 43.

100 Ammonius, *In De interpret.*, p. 37,14–18 Busse, cited in the translation by D. Blank 1996, p. 45 ff.

101 A. Sheppard 1987, "Proclus' philosophical method of exegesis …", p. 147: "Proclus goes on to say that at *Crat.* 435a ff. Socrates will argue that names are not natural … 'for the natural is twofold just as the conventional is' (= *In Crat.*, 26, 2–3)." This half-phrase can be elucidated by the ample explanations of Ammonius which we have just summarized.—Unlike

the excerptor's brief quotations or summaries become completely comprehensible only upon reading the exhaustive parallel argumentation of Ammonius. I think it is likely that it was Proclus who was the first to introduce this comparison with the *Cratylus* (which is neither necessary nor out of place in an explanation of the *De interpretatione*) in his lessons on this treatise, since it is not found in Boethius, who relies on the commentary by Porphyry, but also knows the one by Syrianus. Porphyry's commentary on the *De interpretatione*, moreover, seems to have played the same crucial role in the history of Neoplatonic commentaries on this treatise as his two commentaries on the *Categories* in the history of commentaries on the *Categories*.[102] With regard to Porphyry's commentary on the *De interpretatione*, D. Blank rightly remarks:[103] "There are many points of contact between Ammonius and Boethius, and when they overlap, that appears to be good evidence for the reconstruction of Porphyry's great commentary. When Ammonius cites commentators earlier than Porphyry, i.e. Alexander of Aphrodisias, Aspasius, Herminus, and the Stoics, he may safely be assumed to be citing them from Porphyry, given that he usually appends Porphyry's critique of each citation."

Let us summarize the results obtained so far: if Ammonius, in his commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, does not expatiate on the divine names, as Proclus does in his commentary on Plato's *Cratylus*, this can be very well explained by the mere fact that according to the Neoplatonists, neither the goals of the two works to be commented, nor the levels required to study them are the same. One does not talk about any subject on any occasion.

Yet R. Sorabji cites the *Prolegomena to the philosophy of Plato* as proof of the contrary: "The *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Theology*, he says (p. 206), … also represents an early stage, but that does not prevent it at least summarizing the whole curriculum and its contribution to different levels of virtue up to the contemplative virtues, which would be beyond the understanding of beginning students". I would first answer as follows: The *Prolegomena* are an introduction to the Platonic cycle of Neoplatonic studies, which presents in order, among

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R. Sorabji, I do not get the impression, upon reading this article, that A. Sheppard wanted to prove that Ammonius was, as far as his commentary on the *De interpr*. was concerned, "enormously influenced" by Proclus' commentary on the *Cratylus*, but rather that Ammonius' commentary, because it was based on Proclus' courses on the *De interp*., enriched in the case reported by a comparison with the *Cratylus*, may help to elucidate some excerpts from Proclus' commentary on the *Cratylus*.

102 This history has been the subject of several studies: cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990; C. Luna *et alii*, 1990; C. Luna *et alii*, 2001.

103 D. Blank 1996, p. 3 ff.

other things, a biography of Plato, a characterization of his philosophy and of the literary form of his works, an inventory of all of his 32 dialogues and their possible classifications, and finally the twelve dialogues contained in the future program of study, each of which is coordinated with a specific level of virtue.[104] It is to this last part that R. Sorabji alludes, a part that is nothing other than a program of studies, comparable to the syllabus of which modern students in our universities become aware at the beginning of each semester, which also announces, in part, subjects that are still unknown to the students for whom they are intended.

In addition, however, these *Prolegomena* were addressed to students who were in the process of beginning the Platonic cycle, and who had therefore covered the Aristotelian cycle, down to and including the *Metaphysics*. On the occasion of the study of the *Nicomachean* Ethics[105] at the latest, they had to learn that Aristotelian ethics, with its principle of 'metriopathy', led to the first of the four degrees of the Neoplatonic virtues; that the second one was characterized by (Stoic) *apatheia*, etc. This basic system of virtues, elaborated by Porphyry while systematizing Plotinus, remained almost unchanged down to the end of Neoplatonism. It was even mentioned by Simplicius at the beginning of his commentary on the *Handbook* of Epictetus, intended for raw beginners,[106] to teach them to whom his commentary was addressed: neither to the person capable of living in accordance with purificatory virtue (2nd degree), nor to the contemplative (3rd degree), but to the person who wishes to acquire the (preparatory)[107] ethical and the political virtues (1st degree). That is to say, the students who were already beginning the Platonic cycle, the "greater mysteries", were no longer beginners, but had reached a specific level, and were quite capable of understanding without any difficulty the coordination within the *Prolegomena* of some of Plato's dialogues with the levels of the various virtues.

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104 For instance, the *Prolegomena* say that the *Gorgias* is of the level of political virtue, the *Phaedo* of the level of cathartic virtue, and that is all.

105 L.P. Gerson 2005, p. 242, thinks that Aristotle's *Ethics* were not contained in the plan of Neoplatonic studies, but he is contradicted by Ammonius (*In Cat.*, p. 5, 31–6,8 Busse), Simplicius (*In Cat.*, pp. 4,27–6,15 Kalbfleisch and *In Phys.*, p. 5,27–31 Diels), Olympiodorus (*Proleg.*, pp. 7,35–8,4 and p. 9,9–11 Busse) and David (*In Cat.*, p. 116,15–28 and p. 119,13–25). Cf. the commentary of I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, pp. 84 ff. and pp. 94–96.

106 Simplicius, *In Ench. Epict.*, Praef. 61–81 Hadot 1996 = Preamb. 78–104 Hadot 2001. Cf. I. Hadot 2001, the chapter entitled "La place du commentaire sur le *Manuel* d'Épictète dans l'enseignement néoplatonicien", pp. LXXIII–C = I. Hadot 1978, pp. 147–164.

107 The ethical virtues represent a preparatory virtuous state, acquired by habituation.

R. Sorabji's other argument (p. 206ff.) in favor of his thesis is based on the following phrase (in bold type) by Ammonius, from the beginning of the preface to his commentary on the *De interpretatione*:[108]

> 'Famous among sages and not without glory': this is how Aristotle's *On expression* presents itself, owing to the density of the theoretical observations it contains and the difficulty of its expression. Thus, it has held in check many efforts of many interpreters. **If we, in our turn, could contribute to make this work more clear**, by remembering the explanations of our divine master Proclus, the successor of Plato, who brought to the culmination of human nature the exercise of the power capable of interpreting the opinions of the ancients and of scientifically knowing the nature of existent things, **we should express great gratitude to the god of the *logos***.

Sorabji should have compared this last half-sentence with what is comparable, in this case the beginning of Simplicius' preface to his commentary on the *Categories*, which is as follows:[109]

> Now, whereas the most celebrated philosophers have devoted so much zeal to study the book of the *Categories*, I risk seeming completely ridiculous at the outset in daring to write something on my part as well, unless I could show that the cause of my audacity is perfectly reasonable. For I, for my part, have read the commentaries of some of the philosophers I have mentioned; and I took as my model the commentary of Iamblichus, with all the care of which I was capable, following him step by step and frequently using that philosopher's very text. […] **If I too have been capable of adding something, let thanks be given to the gods as well**, and after them, to those men who led me by the hand to enable me to add some aporia that was not negligible, or some worthwhile explanation of Aristotle's remarks.

108 Ammonius, *In De interpr.* p. 1,3–11 Busse, cited after the translation, slightly modified, by F. Ildefonse–J. Lallot 1992, p. 1f., which I here prefer to the one by D. Blank 1996.

109 Simplicius, *In Cat.*, pp. 2,30–3,13 Kalbfleisch, cited after the translation by Ph. Hoffmann, in I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, p. 8ff.

Instead, R. Sorabji compares this to a prayer which Simplicius added at the end of his commentary on the *De caelo*:[110]

> These reflections, O Lord, Creator of the whole universe and of the simple bodies within it, I offer to you as a hymn, to you and to the beings you have produced, I who have ardently desired to contemplate the greatness of your works and to reveal it to those who are worthy of it, so that, conceiving nothing mean or human about you we may adore you in accordance with your transcendence in relation to all the things you have created.

Having compared what is not comparable, in this case Simplicius' final prayer with Ammonius' short formula of thanks, R. Sorabji concludes that there is a big difference between the religious character of Simplicius' commentary and the one by Ammonius (p. 206 *ad finem*). Yet this difference evaporates immediately when one compares what is comparable, in our case the two really parallel expressions of gratitude by Simplicius (*In Cat.*) and Ammonius (*In De interpretatione*) which I have just cited. It is obvious, moreover, that the two commentaries compared by Sorabji, the *In De caelo* of Simplicius and the *In De interpretatione* of Ammonius, have very different subjects, one of them setting forth the basic elements of logic and being read by beginners, the other being studied after Aristotle's *Physics*, and dealing with the theory of the simple bodies that constitute the universe. The end of Ammonius' commentary on the treatise *De interpretatione*, where a prayer might have been found, has probably not been preserved:[111] indeed, I think it is unlikely that a commentary written by the author himself, as is the case here, and not just noted down by students, could have ended abruptly with the exegesis of the last lines of the treatise to be commented upon. Even if this final prayer did exist, however, it would necessarily have been different in tone and content from Simplicius' prayer at the end of his *In De caelo*, because this kind of prayer generally corresponds quite precisely to the content of the commentary or the treatise at the end of which it is placed.[112]

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110 Simplicius, *In De caelo*, p. 731,25–29 Heiberg, cited in the translation by Ph. Hoffmann 1987, p. 72.

111 The manuscripts of ancient works are often mutilated at the beginning or the end because of material damage, but also out of lack of interest on the part of Christian scribes.

112 A few examples: In the final prayer of Simplicius' commentary on Epictetus, the most important ethical concepts which have been dealt with in the commentary reappear in a brief recapitulation: the soul's original nobility, based on its divine origin, the principle of the automotricity of souls, the effort to purify the soul of the body and of corporeal

In conclusion, I would say this: of Proclus, we have the good fortune to possess his commentaries on the *Parmenides* and the *Timaeus*, the *summum* of Platonic theology according to the Neoplatonists, and these commentaries give us complete information on the complexity of the hierarchy of his ontological system concerning the first principles. Most fortunately, we can also read his biography, or rather his hagiography, composed by his disciple Marinus, who gives a good description of his extreme religiosity. We lack all this with regard to Ammonius. The few preserved books of the commentary by his disciple Asclepius on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, the culmination of the preparatory Aristotelian cycle, merely allow us to say, as we shall see later on, that the ontological doctrine of Asclepius-Ammonius, in the context of the interpretation of this work, is by no means distinct from that of Proclus-Syrianus. In contrast, we have no way of knowing whether he had followed, or would have followed Proclus in all the details of his hierarchical subdivisions of the first principles in his own commentaries on the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides*, nor whether he ever wrote a commentary on these subjects. Likewise, no indication sheds light on the degree of his personal religiosity and his eventual theurgic activities before the persecution. The fact that Ammonius' mother was an accomplished theurgist does not imply that Ammonius himself necessarily had the same concerns. The attitude of the Neoplatonists could be highly varied in this regard.[113] If, therefore, we do not wish to continue to compare what is not comparable, and if we challenge the validity of proofs *ex silentio*, all we can do is to accept the *non liquet*.

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affections, to treat the body as an instrument, etc. Likewise, Iamblichus, at the end of his treatise *De mysteriis*, expresses the desire for participation in the most perfect ideas concerning the gods and the union of souls in theurgic practice. The prayer that ends Simplicius' commentary on the *Categories* alludes to the situation of the *Categories* in the program of philosophical instruction: they are to be the indispensable vademecum for reaching more elevated contemplations. The final prayer of the commentary on the *De Caelo* recalls the theory of simple bodies expounded at length in the commentary, following Aristotle, and summarizes the spirit in which this entire ontological enquiry has been carried out: the desire to contemplate the works of the demiurge.

113 Cf. on this subject Damascius, *In Phaed.*, I, 172,1–5, p. 105 Westerink: "Some place philosophy before all things, such are Porphyry, Plotinus, and many other philosophers. Others place the hieratic art in first position: such are Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, and all the hieratics. But Plato, understanding that the reasons for the defense were numerous on both sides, gathered them together into a single truth, and called the philosopher a Bacchus". Thus, Damascius distinguished three groups of Neoplatonic philosophers: those who preferred philosophy to theurgy, those who held the contrary opinion, and those for whom philosophy and theurgy were of equal value.

Thus, although Verrycken and Sorabji abandon, as we have seen, the essential elements of the views of K. Praechter concerning the fundamental difference between the doctrines of the school of Athens and those of Alexandria, they nevertheless admit a limited divergence between these two schools at the turn of the 5th–6th centuries. This is not the opinion of L. Cardullo,[114] who, basing herself on an in-depth study of the commentary of Asclepius-Ammonius on book Alpha of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, reaches the conclusion that, except with regard to a more pronounced harmonizing tendency on the part of Ammonius-Asclepius, nothing distinguishes the doctrinal content of these two philosophers from that of Syrianus-Proclus: "That which Ammonius counterposes to the anti-Platonic theses is a universe made from principles that are fundamentally Pythagorean, Platonic, and Neoplatonic, and in which some Aristotelian elements also find a place: it contains monads and dyads, the couple *peras* and *apeiron*, ideal numbers and magnitudes, an Intellect (understood either as the Aristotelian *Noûs*, or as the Platonic demiurgic Intellect, or, again, as the monad of the *agrapha dogmata*, or, finally, as the second Neoplatonic hypostasis) and a cosmic Soul, the ideas or intelligible forms, the demiurgic logoi and material forms (ἔνυλα εἴδη), particular souls and creative nature; all of which, however, is governed and sustained by a supreme, transcendent Henad, the absolute Good and unifying potency of each thing, reminiscent of Syrianus. Although we often find ourselves in the presence of a true and proper mixture, dictated by the demands for harmonization, of Pythagorean-Platonic-Neoplatonic and Aristotelian elements, carried out, by the way, also in a clumsy, repetitive, inelegant way by a not-very-gifted student, the pre-eminent features of the theological vision which emerges—far from appearing pre-Plotinian or theistic, or primarily Aristotelianizing, or, again, Christianizing—reveal, without any doubt, the Neoplatonism professed at Athens.[115]" It is therefore this article, to which we shall return further on in our discussion, that drives a nail in the coffin of the theory of K. Praechter and his more or less conformist followers, according to whom the Alexandrian school of Ammonius diverged in a more or less significant way from Athenian Neoplatonism; and with this result in mind, we can now approach our main subject.

114 L. Cardullo 2009 "Una lettura neoplatonica di *Metaphysica Alpha*: gli scolii di Asclepio di Tralle trascritti 'dalla voce' di Ammonio".

115 L. Cardullo 2009, p. 247.

3 The Meaning of the Term 'Harmonization' and Its Historical Background

In order to avoid misunderstandings, it is worthwhile insisting beforehand on the definition of the term 'harmonization', for there is no unanimity on the subject. The term 'harmonization' or 'agreement' translates the Greek term συμφωνία and the Latin term 'concordia'. The context in which Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 2.5–25 Kalbfleisch uses this term when he describes how Iamblichus explained Aristotle's *Categories* with the help of a treatise by the pseudo-Archytas, shows that 'harmonization' is not identical with 'identification'.[116] Simplicius' text, moreover, allows one to imagine that the term συμφωνία used with regard to the philosophies of Aristotle and the Pythagorean Archytas, the friend of Plato, was already present in the commentary of Iamblichus, which Simplicius was following step for step. Likewise, Hierocles affirms "the agreement between the thought of Plato and that of Aristotle" (σύμφωνον … Πλάτωνός τε καὶ Ἀριστοτέλου τὴν γνώμην), not on every point, but "in the most important and necessary doctrines",[117] tracing this viewpoint back to Ammonius Saccas. Boethius' Latin translation of this term by 'concordia' (*In De interpr.*, ed. II, *prolog*. 80,1–6 Meiser) has the same meaning: that is, it designates the philosophical agreement between Plato and Aristotle in most cases: "… *non equidem contempserim Aristotelis Platonisque sententias in unam quodammodo revocare concordiam eosque non ut plerique dissentire in omnibus, sed in plerisque et his in philosophia maximis consentire demonstrem*." Other circumlocutions are to be understood in the same sense, for instance the title of a lost work by Porphyry Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι τὴν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους αἵρεσιν, the term ὁμοδοξία used by Photius when summarizing the contents of the sixth book of Hierocles' *De providentia*, which deals with the agreement between the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato (cf. above, p. 1f., and below, p. 97 ff.), and the verb *concinere* in Augustine, *Contra Acad.*, III,19,42. I could not name any Neoplatonist who

116 Cited in the translation by M. Chase 2003, *Simplicius. On Aristotle Categories* 1–4, p. 18: "Iamblichus, then, adduced the considerations of Archytas in the appropriate places, unfolding that which had been intellectively concentrated, and demonstrating their accord (*symphonia*) with the doctrines of Aristotle. If there happened to be anything discordant between them—there are few such instances—then he brought these differences, too, to the attention of lovers of knowledge; nor did he leave the cause of the discord unexamined. Rightly so, for it is obvious that Aristotle always wants to remain faithful to Archytas".

117 Hierocles in Photius, *Library*, vol. III, codex 214, p. 126 Henry.

defended a one hundred percent agreement between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

Yet it is precisely in the sense of 'identification' that Chr. Helmig, for instance, understands the term 'harmonization' in his article "'The truth can never be refuted'—Syrianus' view(s) on Aristotle reconsidered".[118] Indeed, he writes, for instance (p. 371): "Whether he [= Syrianus] wants to 'reconcile' them [= Aristotle and Plato] is a more difficult issue. He certainly does not harmonize them". This divergence between my understanding of the term, which is shared by most interpreters, and his, plays a considerable role in all the cases in which Helmig criticizes my position and those that are similar to mine.[119]

M. Rashed 2009 understands the term 'harmonization' in the same way as Helmig. He writes (p. 50f.): "there is no hint whatsoever that al-Fārābī upheld the Neoplatonic claim of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle. The most we can say is that he saw in them two different enterprises which were, in certain respects, complementary. But he would surely have considered the claim that both philosophers were in agreement on every question as going too far". What M. Rashed calls "the Neoplatonic claim", viz. harmony understood as the identification of the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, never existed, as is proved by the texts I have just cited, as well as by all the rest of my exposition. On the contrary, what he admits as the thought of al-Fārābī is indeed Neoplatonic. Without realizing it, he attributes to al-Fārābī the contrary of what he would like to attribute to him: that is, his agreement with Neoplatonism.[120]

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118 Chr. Helmig 2009.

119 Such, for instance, as that of L.P. Gerson 2006, "The Harmony of Aristotle and Plato according to Neoplatonism".

120 Unfortunately, the errors of M. Rashed are not rare with regard to Neoplatonic doctrines. In the context of the present research, I can add only one other example of an obvious mistake. After the quotation of a text from al-Fārābī, where the question at issue is that of God as creator of the world, he says this (p. 6): "I hold that this text, with its conspicuous insistence on God's will—the words 'will', 'wills' and 'willing' appear no less than seven times in eight Arabic lines—cannot possibly have been written by al-Fārābī. It is well known that in the fierce debate between the mutakallimūn and the falāsifa on the question of God's attributes, one of the most crucial points at stake was the question of God's will. Philosophers in the Neoplatonic tradition deny it …". And yet, the doctrine that the Demiurge (often called simply 'God') creates "by his being and his will" is common to all the Neoplatonists (for instance Porphyry, Hierocles, Proclus): cf. the Neoplatonic texts on this subject collected in I. Hadot 2004, pp. 24–30. As far as I can see, M. Rashed never takes the trouble in this article to prove his affirmations concerning Neoplatonic philosophy by citing texts. It is true that he would not be able to find any.

The fact that harmonization between the philosophies of the two philosophers does not amount to their identification has also been strongly emphasized by F. Renaud in his article "Tradition et critique: lecture jumelée de Platon et Aristote chez Olympiodore", to which I shall return later on (p. 145 f. with note 295).

With regard to the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, it is important to take into account the fact that it fits within a movement that is much more vast. It begins with the conciliation of Plato's philosophy with that of Pythagoras, with the latter being viewed as the catch basin of all previous wisdoms and religions: Egyptian, Phoenician, Chaldaean, Persian, Indian, and Greek, with this last category including Orphism and the various mystery cults. This movement to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Pythagoras, often called, rather arbitrarily, 'Neopythagorean',[121] is attested from the second half of the first century before our era, but it must be older, as is shown, *inter alia*, by such turns of phrase as Πλάτων καὶ οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι in Theophrastus[122] and their context, as well as the work on Pythagoras[123] by Xenocrates, second successor to Plato at the Academy. Eudorus of Alexandria, who developed a doctrine of the first principles that was a mixture of Platonism and Pythagoreanism, was the first known representative of this tendency, soon followed by Moderatus of Gades, Nicomachus of Gerasa, Theon of Smyrna, and other Pythagoreanizing Platonists. Their sources must have been Plato's late dialogues, legends, as well as a rather large number of anonymous[124] or pseudepigraphic works, such as the one that was falsely attributed

121 Generally speaking, it is impossible, given the state of our information, to distinguish the doctrine of the so-called Neopythagoreans from those of the Platonists. The representatives of these two tendencies generally agreed in seeing in Plato a spiritual disciple of Pythagoras, as well as in giving a preponderant role to Pythagorean number mysticism in the context of their philosophy. What is more, both groups studied the same writings: the works of Plato, the *Epinomis*, a few rare works by ancient Pythagoreans, or people considered to be such, which we no longer possess, as well as a considerable number of Pythagorean works that we today consider to be apocryphal, but whose authenticity had not yet been doubted at the time. It is possible that at the beginning, the only difference between these two tendencies consisted in the fact of observing, or failing to observe, a vegetarian diet. On this subject, cf. the excellent article by B. Centrone 2000, "Cosa significa essere pitagorico in età imperiale. Per una riconsiderazione della categoria storiografica del neopitagorismo".

122 Theophrastus, *Metaph*. 33, p. XI a 27 Usener = Diels-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* I, 58 B 14, p. 454.

123 Only sparse fragments remain.

124 In this regard, cf. *inter alia* the article "Les 'Mémoires pythagoriques' cités par Alexandre

to Archytas of Tarentum, a Pythagorean of the 5th century before our era, a work we shall discuss again later on.[125] This pseudepigraphic work, written in the Doric dialect and dated by T.A. Szlezák to the second half of the first century before our era,[126] was taken to be authentic by such philosophers as Iamblichus and Simplicius—Themistius seems to have been the only one not to have been fooled.[127] This treatise is particularly interesting, for it testifies to the tendency of some Neopythagoreanizing Platonists to wish to harmonize not only the philosophies of Plato and Pythagoras, but, probably under the influence of Antiochus of Ascalon, to also include Aristotle in this process. Antiochus of Ascalon, for his part, does not seem to have been interested in Pythagoreanism. As he turned away from the Sceptical Academy, he wished instead to carry out a return to the Old Academy, and he is known as the first Platonist to have worked to bring Platonism closer together with the philosophies of the Stoa and the Peripatos. He declared that not only did Aristotle and his school derive from the Old Academy, but also the Stoics, whose founder Zeno had been the student of Polemo, a member of Plato's Academy.

To return to the pseudepigraphic work attributed to Archytas of Tarentum, I adopt the following explanation by Ph. Hoffmann:[128] "… the author of the forgery attributed to Archytas did for Aristotle what Eudorus of Alexandria did for the Platonic doctrine of the principles in his Περὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ. Pythagoras is the source, close to the gods, of all philosophy. Plato and Aristotle are his disciples and successors, and their philosophies agree with one another (this is the συμφωνία of which Antiochus of Ascalon laid the durable foundations), and they also agree, fundamentally, with the revelation of Pythagoras. The forger's goal was to offer a vision of the doctrine of the categories to which none of the objections addressed to Aristotle could be opposed. For this purpose, he used Aristotelian texts which he translated into Doric (*Categories*, *Physics*, *Protreptic*), as well as the results of contemporary discussions on the categories (Andronicus, Athenodorus, Boethus, Eudorus); sometimes one detects a Stoic contamination …". A pseudepigraphic work of the same kind, but seeking to

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Polyhistor" by A.-J. Festugière 1945. I greatly regret, moreover, that this author's works on Neoplatonism and Hermeticism, all of which testify to a very deep erudition, are scarcely read at present.

125 Cf. also below, p. 67 f.

126 Cf. Th.A. Szlezák 1972, *Pseudo-Archytas über die Kategorien*, p. 14.

127 Cf. below, p. 85.

128 Ph. Hoffmann 1980, "Jamblique exégète du pythagoricien Archytas: trois originalités d'une doctrine du temps", p. 309.

prove Plato's dependence on Pythagoras, is the Doric treatise *On the nature of the cosmos and the soul*, falsely attributed to the Pythagorean Timaeus of Locris, the central figure of Plato's *Timaeus*. As M. Baltes[129] observes, the content and plan of this treatise broadly agree with the content and plan of the discourse held by Timaeus of Locris in Plato's eponymous dialogue, and implicitly claims to have been the source of Plato's *Timaeus*.

Seen from this perspective, Plato is no longer the founder of his own school, but the *n*th successor of a school founded by Pythagoras. In his *Life of Pythagoras*, § 265 ff., Iamblichus counts seven heads of the school, including Pythagoras, before Plato, and the anonymous *Life of Pythagoras* which Photius summarizes in his *Library* makes Plato the ninth successor of Pythagoras and student of Archytas of Tarentum, while Aristotle is the tenth successor.[130]

This entire movement of the Pythagorization of Plato's philosophy reaches its culmination with the Neoplatonist Iamblichus, as we will discuss in more detail below.[131] For the moment, we shall only mention his *Life of Pythagoras*, which is rich in information about his own philosophical-religious orientation. In a passage taken from the *Harmonic introduction* by Nicomachus of Gerasa,[132] Iamblichus expounds at length on Pythagoras' path of initiation and learning.[133] After sojourns with Anaximander and the sages Bias, at Priene, and Thales at Miletus, Thales sent Pythagoras to the priests of Memphis and Diospolis (= Thebes) in Egypt. Yet Pythagoras first set out for Sidon, among the Phoenicians, where he met the Phoenician hierophants and had himself initiated into the mysteries of Byblos, Tyre, and most of Syria. From there, he went to Egypt, where he spent 22 years visiting all the temples, devoting himself to astronomy and geometry, and having himself initiated into all the mysteries of all the gods. Having been taken prisoner by the troops of the Persian king Cambyses, he was taken to Babylon, where he spent his time with the Magi, among whom he reached the summit of arithmetic, music, and the other mathematical sciences. He remained there twelve years, and finally returned to Samos before leaving for South Italy. At § 146, Iamblichus had already emphasized

129 M. Baltes 1972, *Timaios Lokros, Über die Natur des Kosmos und der Seele*, p. 1. Baltes thinks that the treatise is probably a product of the school of Eudorus of Alexandria, and dates it from the second half of the first century before or the first century of our era (p. 24 ff.). Stoic and Peripatetic elements can be detected within it.

130 Photius, *Library*, codex 249, p. 126 Henry.

131 Cf. below, p. 66 ff.

132 *Harmonicum Enchiridium*, ch. 6 and 7 v. Jahn.

133 Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, § 11–19.

that the Pythagorean theory of numbers had been taken from Orpheus, and at § 151 he makes Pythagoras a practitioner of Orphic rites of purification and mysteries. Since Pythagoras was said to have sung Homer and Hesiod (§ 32) while accompanying himself on the lyre, these two poets could not be missing from the list of ancient authorities, despite Plato's criticism of poets in the *Republic*. Finally, Iamblichus projects his own philosophico-religious ideal upon the personage of Pythagoras, by saying that the latter had succeeded in carrying out a synthesis between divine philosophy and the cults of the gods (σύνθετον αὐτὸν ποιῆσαι τὴν θείαν φιλοσοφίαν καὶ θεραπείαν), learning some things from the Orphics, others from the Egyptian priests, still others from the Chaldaeans, the Magi, and from the mysteries of Eleusis, Imbros, Samothrace and Lemnos, and from all that can be found among the Etruscans,[134] the Celts, and in Iberia.

To carry out a synthesis between philosophy and religion, or rather between philosophy and all religions, as long as they are ancient: such was the goal toward which Iamblichus tended. Obviously, in the Mediterranean lands, and more generally in the *Imperium Romanum*, the progressive assimilation between various national systems of gods[135] had greatly facilitated such a procedure. What is more, however, for Iamblichus philosophy itself was, from its origins and through the intermediary of the divine Pythagoras, a divine revelation, and for this very reason was accessible only with the help of the gods, that is, theurgy. Since Pythagoras' philosophy was given at the beginning by the gods, he says,[136] it can only be grasped with their help.

Porphyry, in contrast, who relied in his own *Life of Pythagoras* on approximately the same sources as Iamblichus, refused to assign to the philosophy of Pythagoras the same goal as Iamblichus, viz. the synthesis between philosophy and religion. Indeed, in this context Porphyry avoids any allusion to religions and mysteries, and places his emphasis on the rational character of the philosophy of Pythagoras:[137]

> He [scil. Pythagoras] professed a philosophy whose goal was to deliver and to free completely from these shackles and bonds the intellect (νοῦν) that was attributed to us, and without which one could not learn or

134 Iamblichus' text reads κοινοῖς, while the text of Nicomachus reads τυρσηνοῖς.

135 The Egyptian goddess Isis, for instance, was assimilated, *inter alia*, to the Greek goddess Demeter and the Syrian goddess Atargatis, also known as the 'Syrian Hera'.

136 Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, § 1.

137 Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras*, §§ 46 and 47, cited after the modified translation of Éd. des Places 1982, *Porphyre, Vie de Pythagore, Lettre à Marcella*, p. 57 f.

> perceive anything sensible and true, whatever the active sense may be. For the intellect by itself 'sees all and hears all; the rest is deaf and blind'.[138] Once the intellect has been purified, it must be provided with something that is profitable for it. Now Pythagoras provided this by imagining this method: first, he guided it insensibly toward the contemplation of the eternal incorporeals of the same kind (as it), which always remain in an identical and immutable state, (and he guided it) by progressing little by little, lest, troubled by the suddenness and abruptness of the change, it be repelled and discouraged, having been nourished in vice for too long. Thus, by the sciences situated halfway between research on bodies and on the incorporeals [which are three-dimensional like bodies, and without resistance like the incorporeals], he prepared it (προεγύμναζε) gradually (for the study) of the truly existent beings from the corporeal which never remains the slightest bit identical and permanent in the same place, leading the eyes of the soul with skillful method until it acquires its nourishment. Thereby, by introducing mankind to the contemplation of the true realities, he made them happy.

Judging by the introductions of the Alexandrian commentators and Simplicius to Aristotle's *Categories*, by the preliminary purification of the intellect, Porphyry must mean a rather pre-philosophical ethical preparation that relies on right opinion. This preparatory purification is acquired, then, either by reading works containing traditional paraeneses such as Isocrates' *Speech to Demonicus* or *To Nicocles*, the Pythagorean *Carmen aureum*, and even the *Handbook* of Epictetus, cleansed of its Stoic character. All these works featured the advantage of being written in verse or in short sentences capable of immediately striking the auditor and becoming fixed in his memory.[139] By the sciences "situated halfway between research on bodies and on incorporeals", one must obviously understand the four sciences of the *quadrivium* (geometry, astronomy-astrology, arithmetic, music), which, together with the three sciences of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric and dialectic), formed the cycle of the seven liberal arts, which is, as I hope to have demonstrated elsewhere, a Neoplatonic creation.[140]

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138 Epicharmus, fr. 12 Diels-Kranz.

139 Cf. I. Hadot 1978, pp. 161–164; I. Hadot 1996, pp. 51–54; I. Hadot 2001, pp. XII–XCVII, and I. Hadot et alii 1990, pp. 94–96.

140 Cf. I. Hadot 2005², *Arts libéraux et philosophie dans la pensée antique*.—For the Neoplatonists, these four mathematical sciences had a completely different meaning than for the non-philosophers of their time, and for us today. Already since Plato, they had close

Porphyry's definition of the philosophy of Pythagoras corresponds entirely to his own attitude toward theurgy and ancestral cults: they can help to purify the soul's pneumatic vehicle, but according to Augustine, Porphyry affirmed that "the rational soul (*anima rationalis*) or, as he prefers to say, the intellectual (*intellectualis*) soul, can take refuge in its own life, even if that which is its pneumatic (*quod eius spiritale est*)[141] has not been purified by any theurgic art".[142] Shortly before, he affirms that theurgical rites do not provide any purification for the intellectual soul that could make it able to see God and the genuine existents. Unlike Iamblichus, Porphyry was convinced that the rational souls of a small number of people could return after the death of their body to their creator by the strength of their reason alone and the study of philosophy, without the intervention of the grace of God or the gods. The souls of those who are not capable of living according to reason, by contrast, if helped by theurgy, can, after the death of their body, inhabit regions of the air among the gods of the ether.

These diverse positions are based on different ontological viewpoints. Porphyry believed deeply in the relative proximity of the human intellect to the divine intellect, and was therefore confident in the reliability of his reasoning, whereas subsequently, and beginning with Iamblichus, the human intellect found itself separated from the divine intellect by an ever-growing number of intermediary hypostases. By losing, at the same time, its proximity to the

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relations with ontology and were considered as preliminary conditions for studying philosophy. From the time of the Middle Platonist mathematician Nicomachus of Gerasa down to Proclus in the 5th century, works were written that presented this link between mathematics and ontology in a systematic way. In the introduction to his commentary on the first book of Euclid's *Elements*, Proclus demonstrates, as Nicomachus had already done, that the four mathematical sciences have their roots in the intelligible forms of Being. This means that for him, the laws of the mathematical sciences, since they are immutable, cannot be the result of abstraction from the geometrical forms and numerical relations that are present in the objects of the sensible world, for the sensible world is subject to perpetual change, and consequently cannot be the object of science. Mathematical laws, on the contrary, are the product of the rational part of the human soul, and are the images of the ontological realities present in the intelligible world, images of the Idea-Numbers, which play the part of models of the sensible world. Before its descent into the sensible world, the human soul was able to contemplate these models. It is thus the activity of the human soul that spontaneously discovers the mathematical sciences by remembering what it has contemplated, by concentrating thought upon itself.

141 That is, its pneumatic body.

142 Augustine, *De civit. Dei*, X,9,20–35= Porphyry, Fr. 290 Smith. Cf. fragments 283–302 Smith of Porphyry's *De regressu animae*.

divine intellect and its ability to reach knowledge of the intelligibles by itself, the human intellect became dependent on divine assistance, in the form of religion and theurgy.

These two attitudes of Porphyry and Iamblichus towards religions and theurgy, were continued after them, as we shall see, in later Neoplatonism: Porphyry's attitude by the supporters of his student Theodorus of Asine down to Themistius, and probably beyond, whereas the attitude of Iamblichus found its most famous representatives in Syrianus and Proclus.[143]

Let us now return, however, to Antiochus. Unlike the Pythagoreanizing Platonists, he does not seem to have made Plato and Aristotle depend on Pythagoras, but he insisted, as has already been said (p. 44) on the fact that the founders of the Stoa and the Peripatos belonged to the same school, that is, Plato's Academy: the three schools said basically the same things, in different terminology. Antiochus' views on the doctrinal harmony between the Platonist and Peripatetic schools were adopted, albeit to different degrees, by most Middle Platonists and by all Neoplatonists down to the end of pagan philosophy. The same did not hold true as far as Antiochus' attitude to Stoicism was concerned, because of which later Platonists even accused him of treachery. Paradoxically, however, this hostility did not bring about the disappearance of Stoic elements from the philosophical systems of the Middle Platonists; quite the contrary. It is as if what was rejected of Stoicism was essentially its materialism, while the rest was considered, more and more, as Platonic property. This would explain the fact that many Stoic elements are found particularly among the Neoplatonists, divested of their materialism and transposed into Platonic ontology (on this point, cf. Pierre Hadot 1969, *Porphyre et Victorinus* I, p. 485ff.). From Porphyry on,[144] even the ideal of the Stoic sage was to find its place without any attenuation, in Neoplatonic ethics, alongside Peripatetic metriopathy. Although despised and struck with a *damnatio memoriae*, Antiochus stayed alive through his fundamental conceptions.

Following Antiochus, what most Middle Platonists and all Neoplatonists did was to interpret Plato with the help of Aristotle and the Stoics, considering the doctrines of the latter two as a prolongation of the teaching of Plato. They were not aware of making a choice between dogmas belonging to different philosophical systems, but thought they were drawing from a common source. Whether one uses the term 'eclecticism' or 'syncretism', neither one appropri-

143 Cf. also above, note 113, p. 39.

144 Cf. below, p. 63ff.

ately describes their attitude, for these philosophers were convinced of the deep unity of the systems of Plato and Aristotle, and were not always aware of the properly Stoic character of certain elements of the Neoplatonic system. The Stoic notion of σύγχυσις, which designates a mixture of different elements that is so perfect that the new body thus constituted possesses completely new qualities, seems to me the most appropriate for designating this phenomenon, or perhaps the notion of an alloy, for instance of copper and tin, from which the new metal bronze arises.

Among the Neoplatonists, the tendency to harmonize the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle was thus merely one harmonizing tendency among others. It arose out of two movements of thought that were different at the outset, but ultimately united in Neoplatonism: Pythagoreanizing Platonism, which, on the one hand, saw in the philosophy of Pythagoras the quintessence of all the world's religions and wisdoms, and which, on the other, made Plato and Aristotle successors of Pythagoras, and the Platonism of Antiochus of Ascalon, which proclaimed the fundamental harmony between the doctrines of Plato's Academy, the Stoic school, and the school of Aristotle.

A third factor that contributed to reinforcing the aforementioned tendency was the progressive effort to systematize the philosophy of Plato, as well as of Aristotle: this is a kind of harmonization that takes place within each of these two bodies of work, from which the idea of a development of thought was excluded. On this subject, I refer the reader, as far as Plato is concerned, to the very instructive expositions of G.E. Karamanolis.[145]

With regard to Aristotle, the idea that his work forms a system is not stated *expressis verbis* in the Neoplatonic commentaries, but it comes to light in such areas as the discussion of the authenticity of a treatise, one of the points of the second introductory scheme.[146] Here there appears the firm conviction that by means of his writings, Aristotle wished to provide a complete philosophical system; that he had, so to speak, programmed an entire set of works apt to lead the student by degrees from the most simple and basic philosophical questions as far as metaphysics. In the eyes of the Neoplatonists, this program certainly corresponded to the program of studies they had themselves sketched in the first introductory scheme and which, beginning with logic, led, by way of philosophical ethics, physics, and mathematics, as far as theology. According to them, Aristotle had the intention right from the outset of elaborating a complete philosophical system, and it is for this reason that, for instance, there

145 G.E. Karamanolis 2006, p. 11 ff.

146 Cf. also below, p. 140 ff. On these introductory schemas, cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990.

can be no doubts about the authenticity of the treatise of the *Categories*, for otherwise the Aristotelian system would be *acephalous*, without a head.[147]

I would not like to conclude this chapter without mentioning that the harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle also played a role in Arabic philosophy. In this context, I refer the reader to the highly instructive article by Cr. D'Ancona 2006, entitled "The Topic of the 'Harmony between Plato and Aristotle': Some Examples in Early Arabic Philosophy".

4 Some Characteristic and Permanent Features of the Tendency toward Harmonization of the Philosophies of Plato and Aristotle in Middle- and Neoplatonism

In fact, the tendency toward harmonization was already born in Middle Platonism, and emerged victorious beginning with Porphyry. The title of a lost treatise by the Middle Platonist Atticus, *Against those who claim to interpret Plato by means of Aristotle*, is enough to attest the existence of such a trend among the Middle Platonists. M. Zambon's book *Porphyre et le moyen-platonisme*[148] provides ample documentation on the beginnings of this tendency in the Middle Platonists Plutarch of Chaeronea and Alcinous, among others, and on its completion by Porphyry. There can be no question here of repeating all that Zambon has excellently written on this subject, which researchers who wish to study the commentaries of the late Neoplatonists should begin by reading, along with the book by G.K. Karamanolis, which has already been mentioned.

I shall note only three typical features of this nascent procedure of harmonization, features that we shall encounter once again later on in the introductions to the Alexandrian commentaires on Aristotle's *Organon*. As Zambon points out (p. 326 f.): "in the face of the objections raised by Aristotle's detractors, the strategy of Platonists who favored his integration into Platonic doctrine often consisted in 'backdating' Aristotelian innovations. If the ten categories are already identifiable in the Platonic dialogues, they are not an anti-Platonic innovation, but are an integral, original part of the Master's doctrine.[149] A flagrant example of the tendency to backdate Aristotelian doctrines

147 Cf. David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 14, 19–15,2 Busse; Olympiodorus, *Prol. in Cat.*, p. 24,9–12 Busse; Ammonius, *In Analyt. Prior.* I, p. 5,2–3 Wallies; Pseudo-Arethas, *Scholia in Cat.*, 33b27–28 Brandis.

148 M. Zambon 2002, *Porphyre et le moyen-platonisme*.

149 M. Zambon 2002, *Porphyre et le moyen-platonisme*, p. 318, reports that Alcinoos attributed to Plato, among other doctrines, "the paternity both of the Aristotelian doctrine of the

is provided to us by the treatise Περὶ τοῦ καθόλου λόγου attributed to Archytas, a pseudo-Pythagorean treatise of the 1st century B.C. [see above p. 44], in which the Aristotelian doctrine of the categories is 'ennobled' by its attribution to an illustrious contemporary of Plato. The author of this treatise clearly wished to set forth a doctrine of the categories that answered the objections raised by the critics of Aristotle". The first known use of this treatise in the sense indicated is by Iamblichus in his lost commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*. This is attested by Simplicius, who, according to the affirmations in his own commentary on the *Categories*, followed Iamblichus' commentary very closely.[150] Olympiodorus and David (Elias)[151] also refer to this pseudonymous Archytas in their commentaries on the *Categories*, as does Simplicius in his commentary on the *Physics*.

The other recurrent feature in late Neoplatonism is the affirmation of the superiority of Plato over Aristotle[152] in everything having to do with questions of metaphysics and theology, an affirmation that is implicit in Plutarch (Zambon, p. 76) and broadly developed by the anti-Aristotelian Atticus (Zambon, p. 132 ff.): Aristotle privileged the senses as compared to reason, and he "relies on sight" (Atticus, fr. 3.94 des Places). He possesses an intelligence that is "capable of penetrating earthly phenomena and perceiving their reality, but incapable of contemplating the authentic 'plain of truth'" (Atticus, fr. 9,10–13 des Places). Zambon (p. 133) remarks quite rightly that Atticus, "in a caricatural and excessive way, nevertheless proposes an image of Aristotle that was widespread at the time", and that "it was precisely by invoking its presumably propadeutic and complimentary nature that Aristotelian philosophy was to be

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categories and of syllogistic". For a related attitude on the part of Plutarch, cf. M. Zambon, p. 77.

150 See above, p. 41, n. 116 and below, p. 67 f., the quotations from Simplicius' commentary.

151 Although the Greek manuscripts are unanimous in designating David as the author of this commentary in their titles, its editor A. Busse in the CAG attributed it to Elias, for reasons (parallel texts) that have often been questioned since (see below, p. 158 at the top). A good Armenian translation of this commentary exists, but without title or author's name (cf. J.-P. Mahé 1990, "David l'Invincible dans la tradition arménienne", pp. 189–207). Meanwhile, I restore the author's name as supplied by the Greek manuscripts, comforted in my beliefs by what are, to my knowledge, the most recent discussions on this subject: V. Calzolari (Centre de recherches arménologiques de l'Université de Genève) 2007, "Aux origines de la formation du corpus philosophique en Arménie: quelques remarques sur les versions arméniennes des commentaires grecs de David", especially pp. 271–278, and V. Calzolari 2009, "David et la tradition arménienne", especially pp. 28–32.

152 On this subject, and the fact that "superiority" is not equivalent to "infallibility", cf. below, 145 f.

integrated within Platonism". And it was for the same reasons, we might add, that, in an attenuated form, the same arguments over Plato's superiority over Aristotle reappear once again, as we shall see, in the commentaries by Philoponus, Olympiodorus, Elias and David[153] from the school of Ammonius, and in Simplicius, the student of Ammonius and Damascius. This belief in Plato's superiority does not, moreover, rule out that occasionally, especially in questions connected with the sensible world, Aristotle was vindicated against Plato.

Another constant feature in the Middle- and Neoplatonic interpretation of Aristotle derived its origin in Pythagoreanizing Platonism, which saw a divine revelation in the philosophy of Pythagoras, which could be transmitted only to those who were worthy. Rightly or wrongly, it was thought that the famous Pythagorean *symbola* or *ainigmata* (enigmas) had been deliberately uttered in a language with double meanings. Let us cite Iamblichus[154] in this regard:

> And if someone, after making a choice among the symbols in question, did not interpret them and did not ⟨include⟩ them by means of an interpretation that is not open to sarcasm, what they say would appear to the common man ridiculous and worthy of old wives' tales, full of foolishness and idle chatter. In contrast, when they are decrypted as symbols must be, instead of remaining obscure, as is the case for most people, they become transparent and luminous, comparable to prophesies or the oracles of the Pythian Apollo. They reveal an astonishing thought, and produce a demonic inspiration in those lovers of study who have taken the trouble to understand them.

Plato being viewed as the distant successor of Pythagoras, his myths, and in a certain sense his 'oral teachings'. had been taken as equivalent to the 'symbola', and as far as Aristotle was concerned, it was declared, from the same perspective, that in his treatises that were not intended for the broad public, the "esoteric writings", he had intentionally practiced an obscure style to dismiss undesirable readers. For more details, I refer to note 76, p. 78 and to the chapter entitled "A Neoplatonic exegetical principle: Aristotle's deliberate obscurity (ἀσάφεια) in his properly philosophical works".

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153 David in the Armenian translation of his commentary, lost in Greek, on Aristotle's *Analytica Priora*, and *In Cat.*, p. 120,19 ff.: cf. below, note 124, p. 96 and p. 133 f. with notes 250 and 251.

154 Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, § 105, cited after the translation of L. Brisson et A.-Ph. Segonds 1996, *Vie de Pythagore*, p. 60.

The Harmonizing Tendency from Porphyry to Simplicius

1 Porphyry (circa 234–305/310)

If one can say that the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato became dominant with Porphyry, the disciple of Plotinus, it must be emphasized at the same time that he too did not wish to eliminate all differences between Aristotle and Plato, and it is on this point that I disagree with G.K. Karamanolis.

The titles of Porphyry's lost works, such as *Against Aristotle concerning* (*the doctrine*) *that the soul is an entelechy* and *On the difference between Plato and Aristotle* (238 T Smith), clearly show, in my opinion, that he did not agree with Aristotle on every point.[1] This treatise and the one, also lost, *On the unity of the school of Plato and Aristotle*, probably formed, in the words of R. Bodéüs, "the two components of one and the same discourse".[2]

With regard to the first of these lost treatises, which is probably identical to the treatise in five books *On the soul against Boethos*, all the fragments of which come from the *Evangelical Preparation* by Eusebius, G.K. Karamanolis (p. 295) is of the opinion that those modern commentators who think that in this treatise Porphyry criticizes the Aristotelian doctrine of the soul as entelechy, a theory to which Boethos adheres, are mistaken. He thinks, on the contrary, that "Porphyry rather criticizes a particular understanding of this theory according to which the intellect is inseparable from the living body as it is part of the *empsychia*. For Porphyry, Aristotle's view of the soul as the *entelecheia* of the living body is compatible with the doctrine of the immortality of the intellect, which

1 As we shall see, G.K. Karamanolis 2006, *Plato and Aristotle in agreement*? … does not share this opinion.

2 R. Bodéüs 2008, *Porphyre, Commentaire aux* Catégories *d'Aristote*, p. 9. [G.K. Karamanolis 2006, pp. 249–265, is of the same opinion]. This first genuine critical edition is a marked improvement over the old, highly defective edition by Busse in the CAG. The Introduction serves as a complement to M. Zambon's discussions of Porphyry. Cf. also R. Bodéüs 2001, "Les interlocuteurs fictifs dans le commentaire de Porphyre aux 'Catégories' d'Aristote. Une mise au point". Contrary to received opinion, R. Bodéüs demonstrates that the questions formulated in this commentary are "those of a student who is still imperfectly instructed in Aristotelian thought, whereas the answers are those of a philosopher who, like the author himself, lays claim to an in-depth knowledge of that thought".

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he may have discerned also in Aristotle's remark about the sailor in the ship (*De anima* 413a8–9), as it will be to later Platonists". He admits, however (p. 296) that fragment 249 Smith (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* XV,11,4) does not support his interpretation. Indeed, in it Porphyry gives his approval only to the Platonic doctrine, according to which the soul is a self-moving essence (αὐτοκίνητος οὐσία), and characterizes all the others as despicable: the doctrine (Aristotle's) that considers the soul as being the entelechy of an organic physical body,[3] that of the Stoics and that of the Epicureans. Karamanolis therefore assumes (p. 297, near the bottom) that Eusebius simply made a mistake in attributing to Porphyry a text by Atticus, or else that he wished to deliberately mislead his readers.

Let us note right away that contrary to what Karamanolis implies, fragment 249 is not the only text cited by Eusebius and attributed to Porphyry that goes against his hypothesis. Elsewhere as well, as in fragment 247 Smith (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* XV,10,9–11), Porphyry protests against a person "who says that the soul is an entelechy and that it causes motion while remaining completely immobile",[4] objecting that deliberations (βουλαί), reflections (σκέψεις) and volitions (θελήσεις) of the soul of a living being are indeed motions (ὁρμαί) of the soul, not of the body. It is easy to see that for Porphyry, the incompatibility of the doctrines of Aristotle and Plato on the soul consists in the fact that for one, the soul *qua* entelechy is immobile, whereas for the other it is self-moving. This is indeed, then, a criticism on Porphyry's part of the Aristotelian definition of the soul as entelechy. We find Porphyry's own definition of the soul in his *Sentences*, for instance *Sent.* 17: "The soul is an essence that has neither size, nor matter, nor corruptibility, which possesses being in a life that has by itself the fact of living", and his interpretation of the Platonic automotricity of the soul in *Sent.* 21. After observing that what is alive by virtue of its being must remain alive (*Sent.* 21, p. 13, 2 ff. Lamberz), and that consequently the soul, which is exclusively life, is incorruptible, Porphyry concludes: "This is what the fact that the essence and definition of the soul is automotricity (meant) for Plato".[5]

In addition, fragment 248 Smith (Eusebius, *Praep. evang.* XV 11,2–3), a text in which Porphyry rather violently criticizes the comparison of the soul with heaviness and other qualities of the body, is situated within the same con-

3 πῶς γὰρ οὐκ αἰσχρὸς ὁ ἐντελέχειαν τιθεὶς τὴν ψυχὴν λόγος σώματος φυσικοῦ ὀργανικοῦ.

4 Cf. Arist., *De an.* 406a3; *Phys.* 256b24; Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De an.*, 17,10; 78,25 ff.: ἀκίνητος γὰρ καθ' ἑαυτὴν πᾶσα ἐντελέχεια.

5 Textual translations are based on Brisson *et alii* 2005, *Porphyre, Sentences*, vol. I, pp. 316 and 323.

text: the defense of the Platonic definition of the soul as a self-moving essence. P. Moraux thinks that this argumentation is specially directed against Alexander of Aphrodisias,[6] but it is even more significant that a parallel text is found in Macrobius' commentary on the *Dream of Scipio*, in the midst of a general defense of the automotricity of the soul[7] which is similar in many of its features to that of the *Against Boethos*, and whose source, according to the *communis opinio*, is Porphyry.

The fact that Porphyry did indeed criticize Aristotle on a subject as important as that of the definition of the soul will be amply confirmed by a passage from the *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *De anima* by Themistius,[8] a passage of which Karamanolis seems to be unaware, and which came to my attention primarily through the article by O. Ballériaux, "Thémistius et le néoplatonisme. Le νοῦς παθητικός et l'immortalité de l'âme".[9] It is a paraphrase of Aristotle's *De anima* I 3,406a30–b15 (= Themistius, *In De an.* 16,19–18,31 Heinze). In this passage, Themistius polemicizes against Porphyry by defending Aristotle, to be sure, but while strongly Neoplatonizing him, as he Aristotelianizes Plato. Themistius (16,29–31) upbraids Porphyry for "having understood nothing of the Aristotelian doctrine of motion", an ignorance he finds surprising on the part of someone who had published a Σύνοψις τῶν περὶ κινήσεως εἰρημένων ᾽Αριστοτέλει. Now we know from Simplicius[10] that Περὶ κινήσεως (*On motion*) is the title given by Porphyry and some others to the last four books of Aristotle's *Physics*, and that σύνοψις ['overall view' or 'summary'] is the proper term used to designate the commentary that the same Porphyry had devoted to them.[11] I cite the Aristotelian passage in question after the translation by R. Bodéüs:[12]

> Again, since it appears that the soul sets the body in motion, it may reasonably be supposed to impart to it the motions which it has itself: and, if so, then conversely it is true to say that the motion with which the

6 P. Moraux 1973, *Der Aristotelismus bei den Griechen*, vol. I, p. 175, note 12.

7 Macrobius, *In Somn. Scip.*, II,15,3 ff. See below, pp. 115–118.

8 On Themistius as a Neoplatonic philosopher, cf. below, pp. 74–97.

9 O. Ballériaux 1994.

10 Simplicius, *In Phys.*, 802,8; 918,13.

11 O. Ballériaux 1994, "Thémistius et le néoplatonisme …", p. 184: the words between [] have been added by me. Cf. P. Moraux 1985, "Porphyre, commentateur de la *Physique* d'Aristote", who has shown that Porphyry had provided a detailed commentary of the first four books of Aristotle's *Physics*, whereas for the last four he had contented himself with writing a kind of summary of Aristotle's text.

12 R. Bodéüs 1993, *Aristote, De l'âme*, Paris 1993, p. 104 = Aristotle, *De an.* I, 3, 406a30–b15.

> body is moved (406b1), belongs as well to the soul. Now the motion of the body is motion in space: therefore the motion of the soul would also be motion in space, whether the whole soul so move, or only the parts. But, if this is admissible, the soul might also conceivably quit the body and re-enter; and this would entail the consequence that dead animals may rise again (…) b10–15 but, supposing the soul to be moved at all, one would say that the sensibles (τὰ αἰσθητά) would be the most likely to move it. Again, even if the soul does move itself, this is equivalent to saying that it is moved; and, all motion being defined as outward movement (ἔκστασις) of the thing moved *qua* moved, it will follow that the soul will be moved outward of its own essential nature (ἐξίσταιτ' ἂν ἐκ τῆς οὐσίας), if it be true that its self-movement is not an accident, but that motion belongs to the essence of the soul in and of itself.

I now insert, in the English translation by R.B. Todd,[13] Porphyry's arguments as reported by Themistius, but without answers:

> 16,19 A critic of Aristotle's [arguments][14] objects to his assumptions. For he says that [the soul] does not also cause the body to move with the

13 R.B. Todd 1996, *Themistius, On Aristotle On the Soul*, pp. 31–34.

14 The Greek text is as follows: Ὁ δὲ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους ἐξεταστὴς … . The English translation "a critic of Arisotle" is not quite exact: this is not just any critic, as Todd himself says, p. 160 n. 8. One should rather translate: "he who has closely examined the comments (or the works) of Aristotle", a turn of phrase that indicates that the person in question is so well known for this activity that there is no need to indicate his name, in this case Porphyry. It is all the more remarkable that Themistius disputes his authority so sharply: he was probably irritated by the tone, also sharp, that Porphyry used against Aristotle, for instance in fragment 249 Smith, which we have just discussed. We find a similar attitude toward Porphyry in a letter from the emperor Julian to Priscus, a student of Aidesius (who had in turn been a student of Iamblichus), who was a contemporary of Themistius. In this letter (n° 12 in J. Bidez, *L'empereur Julien*, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. I, deuxième partie, Paris 1924, pp. 18–20), after asking Priscus to send him all the commentaries by Iamblichus on the *Chaldaean Oracles*, because he is "crazy about Iamblichus" and the author of the *Oracles*, Julian comes to speak of the "summaries of Aristotle" (τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους συναγωγῶν) he had read, of which Priscus was the author: "The Tyrian [that is, Porphyry], in many of his books, has only … [the text is corrupt]; you, on the contrary, by means of a single book, on the subject of Aristotelian philosophy, have turned me, perhaps, into a 'Bacchant', and not just just a simple 'narthex-bearer'". The summaries of Priscus must therefore not only have had a much more "Platonizing" nature than the commentaries of Porphyry, but probably also used the tone of disdainful superiority with regard to Porphyry that Iamblichus himself used in his *Treatise on the Mysteries*, and in his *Commentary on the*

> movements with which it itself is moved. For the soul moves by discerning [objects] and giving assent, but the body moves in respect of place. Also the converse is not necessarily true, since the movement with which the body is moved is not always the same as that with which the soul is also moved. For wood is dragged by people, but the people are not dragged [by the wood], and the sun draws exhalations upwards in a straight line, while itself revolving in a circle.
>
> 16,36 But [the critic] says that it is not even necessary that if the soul moves in respect of place, then after exiting [the body] it also re-enters. For not even those who claim that the soul is *pneuma* and endow it with locomotion would, [he says], concede that it re-enters after exiting.
>
> 17,25 But, [the critic] says, the objects of sense-perception do not move the [capacity] for perception, but instead have the status of a necessary condition, and he compares sense-perception to spiders that leap on the animals that fall into their webs, where it is not the [animals] that fall in that cause movement, but rather the inherent impulse [of the spiders]; for this is how objects of sense-perception 'fall into' the sense-organs and provoke the soul to discern them.
>
> 18,16 If we come to grips with this theory, and admit that the movement of the soul is its essence (i.e. its nature), then this, [the critic] says, is why the soul is not removed from its essence the more it is moved. For its movement, he says, is its life, and living for it is the same as being moved.

The entire polemic against Porphyry's criticism of Aristotle, with the responses of Themistius who defends him, a criticism that at first glance gives the impression that Themistius supports Aristotle against Plato, would deserve a long commentary, for which there is not room in this study. Here I can only add the short summary which O. Ballériaux gives of the final conclusion of this discussion, which is surprising for those who still want to see in Themistius a Peripatetic philosopher[15]: "Did Aristotle rebel against his master (…)? No (…)

Timaeus, "where he had not hesitated to say, when criticizing an exegesis of Porphyry, 'There is nothing philosophical about his kind of theory, but it is full of the vanity worthy of a barbarian'" (quotation of Iamblichus by Proclus, *In Tim.*, vol. 1, p. 153,9 Diehl, reported by P. Hadot 1968, *Porphyre et Victorinus*, vol. 1, p. 93 in his discussion of the opposition between Porphyry and Iamblichus)

15 O. Ballériaux 1994, "Thémistius et le néoplatonisme …", p. 184 ff.

Aristotle argued that if the soul moves itself by itself, since all motion is an exit from itself for the mobile *qua* moved, the result must be that the soul will exit its own essence as soon as motion belongs properly to its essence (*De an.*, 406b11–15). To which Porphyry retorted that on the contrary, the more the soul moved itself, the less it exited its essence: the soul's motion is life and to move, for it, is to live (Them., 18,16–20). To claim that, says Themistius, is to ignore the difference that separates motion, an exit from itself, from act, the conservation and accomplishment of the nature that exercises that act. It is to confuse perfect entelechy and motion, an imperfect entelechy (18,20–30).[16] Yet, he continues,

> 'if, to look for a fight, they wanted (the plural should not deceive us, the subject is still Porphyry) to call motion (κίνησις) that which we call act (ἐνέργεια), we shall not quibble about the word, for one can use words as one will, and, more particularly, use species instead of genera. Indeed, motion is a species of act. If there is motion, there is act, but if there is act, there is not necessarily motion. These are terms which, in so many places, Plato himself, quite obviously, uses one for another. This is why one must not quarrel over a word, but it must be known that things are completely different, I mean imperfect and perfect entelechy (18,30–37).'»

It is thus Themistius, probably following Iamblichus, who had made Plato and Aristotle agree on the soul's automotricity, a point on which he was later imitated by Ammonius and Simplicius:[17] indeed, just as he had identified the immortal λογιστικόν of the soul in Plato with Aristotle's νοῦς δυνάμει χωριστός, a subsequent passage of his *Paraphrasis* shows that he understands the term

16 Here, Themistius alludes to Aristotle, *Phys.* VIII, 257b6–10: "In addition, it has been determined that it is the mobile object that is moved (διώρισται ὅτι κινεῖται τὸ κινητόν); but it is moved potentially and not in entelechy. But what is potential moves toward entelechy, and motion (κίνησις) is the incomplete (ἀτελής) entelechy of the mobile object (κινητοῦ)". The argument of the double entelechy (which can be found at several ontological levels), and goes probably back to Iamblichus, was to have a long career. It would still be used by Simplicius (*In De an.*, p. 4,31 Hayduck) and is not, as Perkams thinks (2005, p. 526) "a response to Damascius' *On principles*".

17 The same kind of harmonization, consisting in the statement of differences in vocabuary, but of concordance in meaning, is still found in Philoponus-Ammonius (cf. p. 152) and Simplicius, *In De an.*, III, p. 246,21ff. Hayduck, and especially *In Phys.*, pp. 1247,27–1249, 17 Diels: cf. below, pp. 165–168. By his own admission, Simplicius had followed Iamblichus in his *In De anima*.

autokinêtos used by Plato in the sense of ἐνέργεια (act).[18] Indeed, Aristotle defined the soul both as the entelechy of the body able to receive life, and as its essence and its act.[19] For Porphyry, in contrast, there was not only an incompatibility of viewpoints between the two philosophers on the subject of the soul, but what is more, it is Aristotle who was wrong. For Porphyry, the soul is a self-moving essence, which, in his view, means that it is life, and it cannot, for this reason, be Aristotle's entelechy, which is immobile. It is thus undeniable that Porphyry criticized, even rather violently, the Aristotelian doctrine of the soul as entelechy, and I therefore see no reason to follow G.K. Karamanolis when he questions the attribution of fragment 249 Smith to Porphyry, and when he claims that Porphyry never really criticized Aristotle.[20]

From this example of Porphyry's defense of Plato against Aristotle, let us move on to an example of his practice of the harmonizing method. Because of the influence it had among the late Neoplatonic commentators, I will discuss part of his interpretation of book Λ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as transmitted by Dexippus in his commentary on the *Categories* and commented by P. Hadot in his article "L'harmonie des philosophies de Plotin et d'Aristote selon Porphyre dans le commentaire de Dexippe sur les *Catégories*",[21] to which I refer the reader for further details. Dexippus reports an objection by Plotinus, *Enn*., VI,1,2,4–8 against Aristotle:

> If there are two *ousiai*, one intelligible and the other sensible, how can they be reduced to a single genus? For in these two *ousiai*, what is there in common as far as being is concerned? And assuming there is something in common, one would then have to suppose that there is something previous and different from both which is neither a body nor an incorporeal (to explain their community). The result will be that the incorporeal is a body or that the body is an incorporeal.[22]

18 Themistius, pp. 106,29–107,2 Heinze: "And most of his arguments (*scil*. of Plato) and perhaps the most important concerning the immortality of the soul are referred to the intellect: the one based on automotricity [it has been demonstrated that only the intellect is moved by itself (*autokinêtos*), if we understand 'act' (*energeia*) instead of 'motion' (*kinêsis*)], that which postulates that acts of learning (*mathêseis*) consist in memories (*anamnêseis*) and the one that is based on resemblance with the god".

19 Cf., for instance, Aristotle, *De anima* II, 412a26 and *Metaph*. VIII,1043a35.

20 G.K. Karamanolis 2006, *Plato and Aristotle in agreement*? …, p. 244 among others.

21 P. Hadot 1974.

22 Dexippus, *In Cat*., p. 40,14–18 Busse.

To answer this question, Dexippus makes use of the lost major commentary of Porphyry on the *Categories*, addressed to Gedalios. Porphyry shows that Plotinus was wrong to make this objection, for in his own philosophy, *ousia* extends from the intelligible to the sensible, while undergoing progressive degradation. Plotinus thus reduces everything to intelligible *ousia*, since everything depends on it. Thus, Aristotle's description of *ousia* can also enable a glimpse of the first principle, from which *ousia* has fallen to its lowest degree. Yet Dexippus reports an objection: if Aristotle had used the same principles as Plotinus, this reasoning would be valid, but can one presuppose a doctrinal agreement between Plotinus and Aristotle?[23] This is where Porphyry shows that Book Λ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is in agreement with the philosophy of Plotinus:

> Well, then, for this investigation, I will use what is said in the *Metaphysics*. For there are two *ousiai* according to Aristotle: intelligible *ousia* and sensible *ousia*: intermediary between these two is physical *ousia*. Compound *ousia* is sensible *ousia*; the *ousia* considered according to form and to matter is physical *ousia*; the *ousia* that is above these is the intellective and incorporeal *ousia* which Aristotle often calls, on the one hand immobile, on the other hand causing motion, insofar as it is the cause of motion specified according to life. Indeed, this is what Aristotle demonstrates concerning these *ousiai* in book Λ of the *Metaphysics*. In this treatise, he has gathered the multiple *ousiai* together into the total *ousia*. For he organized them into a unique system, and reduced them to a unique principle. Indeed, what will participate in the One, if *ousia* itself, which has its being in the One, is deprived of the inner coherence that refers to the One?[24]

As P. Hadot explains,[25] this text by Dexippus reveals to us «in an extremely interesting way, how Porphyry interpreted the totality of book Λ in a Plotinian perspective.[26] For a disciple of Plotinus, the intelligible, immobile, and motion-causing *ousia* of Aristotle corresponded to the second hypostasis, that is, the

23 Dexippus, *In Cat.*, p. 41, 4–6 Busse.

24 Dexippus, *In Cat.*, p. 41, 7–18 Busse.

25 P. Hadot 1974, "L'harmonie des philosophies de Plotin et d'Aristote …", pp. 41–42.

26 Reading the article by S. Fazzo 2008 "L'exégèse du livre *Lambda* de la *Métaphysique* d'Aristote dans le *De principiis* et dans la *Quaestio* 1,1 d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise", makes me think that Porphyry may have been helped somewhat in his interpretation by the lost commentary of Alexander of Aphrodisias on book *Lambda*. One must always recall that for the Neoplatonists, the reading of Aristotle most often took place by way of the commentaries of Alexander, even when they criticized him.

Intellect. Beyond this primary *ousia*, there was the absolutely simple One, the principle of *ousia*. In Porphyry's view, the Aristotelian doctrine of *ousia* presupposes and ultimately implies the Plotinian One. Indeed, book Λ proposes a system of *ousiai*, a system whose unity and coherence are ensured by a unique, primary principle, the intelligible *ousia*. Yet according to a fundamental axiom of Neoplatonism, already found in Plotinus (V,6,3,1–23; VI,6,13,17 f.), every organized multiplicity, every "system", presupposes the transcendent One, whose unity founds the possibility of order. The system of *ousiai* thus implies the transcendence of the One. And there must be a system of *ousia*, that is, the various *ousiai* form an ordered, unified multiplicity, for, as Porphyry tells us, the *ousia* has its being in the One. This formula probably alludes to two Plotinian notions. First of all, it recalls the Plotinian principle: "All beings are beings through the One" (VI,9,1,1; V,1,7,15; V,5,6,14 f.). Then, it may allude to the exegesis Plotinus gave of *Timaeus* 37d6, when he said that eternity (assimilated to intelligible *ousia*) resided "in the One" (ἐν ἑνί). Porphyry (*Sent.*, p. 44,21 and 45,2–3 Mommert = p. 58,10 Lamberz) was to take up the expression: καθ' ἓν ἐν ἑνί. Therefore, if the *ousia*, which is so close to the One, since it has its being in the One, was not unified, had no cohesion, and did not form a system, what then could participate in the One? The All would be completely dispersed and torn apart. We are thus justified in supposing that Porphyry had tried to find this Plotinian doctrine in book Λ of the *Metaphysics*. Indeed, the last chapter of Aristotle's book implied that the Good was, in the nature of the All, both like something separated, existing by and in itself, and like the order of the All (1075 a 11). In this Good, existing for and in itself, a Plotinian could recognize the One, principle of universal order, and especially of the system of *ousia*. It was precisely the last chapter of book Λ that insisted on the inner coherence of *ousia*: "Those who would have it that mathematical number is the primary reality, and thus always admit one *ousia* after another, and always admit different principles for each of these *ousiai*, they render the *ousia* of the All incoherent (ἐπεισοδιώδη)—for whether it exists or not, one *ousia* has no relations with another *ousia*—and they accept a multiplicity of principles. Yet beings do not wish to be badly governed: 'The government of many is not good: let one alone be the sovereign (1075 b 38)'".[27] We can discern this Aristotelian phrase behind Porphyry's discussion: "He organized the *ousiai* into a unique system and related them to a unique principle. Indeed, what will participate in the One if the *ousia* itself, which has its being in the One, is deprived of the inner coherence that refers to the One?"» In any case, it is this end of book Λ, with its quotation from Homer,

27 A citation of Homer, *Iliad*, II, 204.

that, as we have glimpsed (cf. p. 28, note 85), was to lead Syrianus to admit that Aristotle recognized the Neoplatonic One, although it was reduced to the role of final cause. As we shall see, in Ammonius and his school, as well as in Simplicius, this was to be useful for proving that the goal of Aristotle's philosophy is nothing other than the Neoplatonic One, as final cause and as *causa efficiens*. In addition, the paraphrase of this same book Λ by the Neoplatonist Themistius, preserved in Hebrew and Arabic versions,[28] will serve us as an intermediate witness of the fact that this text never ceased playing an important role in the elaboration of the harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

It was once again Porphyry who provided a definitive place within the Neoplatonic philosophical system for part of Aristotle's ethics. By interpreting and systematizing Plotinus' treatise *On the virtues* (*Enn.* I,2), he constructed a canon of four degrees of virtues which, in its essential aspects, remained in effect throughout later Neoplatonism. The last witness to it is the prologue of Simplicius' commentary on the *Handbook* of Epictetus. These four virtues are the 'civil' or 'political' virtues, the cathartic virtues, the theoretical virtues, and finally the paradigmatic virtues. At the same level as the latter, or at a higher level, the later Neoplatonists were to speak of 'theurgical', 'enthusiastic', or 'hieratic' virtues, while still maintaining the four-part scheme. It is the first level of these virtues, the 'civic' or 'political' virtues, that is based on Aristotelian *metriopathy*, whereas the second level of the cathartic virtues, and the virtues of an even higher level, are characterized by Stoic *apatheia*.[29] The notion of μετριοπάθεια used by Porphyry[30] was developed out of the Aristotelian definition of virtue as a mean term between two excesses. The works of Cicero[31] testify to the lively polemic in the Hellenistic period between Peripatetics (*Peripatetici*) and Stoics on the question of whether the passions should be

28 See below, pp. 91–97. On Iamblichus and Simplicius, cf. below, n. 38, p. 66.

29 Cf. in I. Hadot 1978, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin—Hiéroclès et Simplicius*, the chapters "Métriopathie aristotélicienne et apathie stoïcienne dans le néoplatonisme" et "La systématisation des éléments platoniciens dans le système porphyrien des vertus", pp. 150–158. These chapters were taken up in I. Hadot 2001, Simplicius, *Commentaire sur le Manuel d'Épictète* (chap. I à XXIX), pp. LXXVII–LXXXVIII.

30 Porphyry, *Sent.*, 32, p. 23,4 Lamberz.

31 Cf. Cicero, *De officiis*, I, 88–89: "Numquam enim iratus [...] mediocritatem [a translation of μετριότης, an Aristotelian term] illam tenebit, quae est inter minimum et parum, quae placet Peripateticis et recte placet, modo ne laudarent iracundiam et dicerent utiliter a natura datum". On the origin of the term 'metriopathy' cf. I. and P. Hadot 2004, *Apprendre à philosopher dans l'Antiquité. L'enseignement du "Manuel d'Épictète" et son commentaire néoplatonicien*, pp. 77–80.

moderated or eradicated. No doubt some representatives of Middle Platonism already tried to unite Stoic *apatheia* and Peripatetic *metriopatheia* within a single ethical system. We find traces of such a system in Philo of Alexandria: in the *Legum allegoriae* (III, §129–144), Aaron is characterized as he who is making progress in morality (προκόπτων), who practices the moderation of passions (μετριοπαθεῖν ἀσκεῖ), whereas Moses, the perfect man, has reached the superior stage of *apatheia*.

Although it is not expressed textually anywhere in his preserved works, Porphyry also seems to think that part of Aristotle's works should serve as an introduction to the philosophy of Plato. In any case, Aristotle's *Categories* are the book which, according to him (*In Cat.*, 56,26–31) "is the most elementary one there is, and serves as an introduction to all the parts of philosophy. It would even serve perfectly as a preliminary to the natural part of philosophy …",[32] and is therefore addressed to beginners in philosophy. In this perspective, the definition of the goal (σκοπός) of the *Categories*—according to Porphyry, this is a treatise that primarily discusses neither the genera of being, nor simple grammatical distinction, but linguistic expressions that signify things—, and of Aristotle's other treatises is of fundamental importance.[33] It serves, for instance, except for Iamblichus, to exclude any ontological discussion of the interpretation of the *Categories*. The eminently pedagogical conception of the two cycles of Neoplatonic studies takes its starting-point from Porphyry.

Porphyry was the first known Platonist to comment upon Aristotle: in addition to his commentaries, all of them lost, on dialogues of Plato (*In Cratylum*, *In Sophistem*, *In Parmenidem*, *In Timaeum*, *In Philebum*, *In Phaedonem*, *In Rem publicam*), he wrote commentaries on treatises by Aristotle: 1) *In Aristotelis Categorias per interrogationem et responsionem*; 2) *In Aristotelis Categorias ad Gedalium* (lost); 3) *In Aristotelis De interpretatione* (lost); 4) *Introductio in categoricos syllogismos* (lost); 5) *In Aristotelis Refutationes sophisticas* (lost); 6) In *Aristotelis Ethicorum libros* (lost, mentioned only in Arabic literature); 7) *In Aristotelis Physicae libros I–IV* (lost);[34] 8) a *Synopsis* of books V to VIII of the *Physics*; 9) *In Aristotelis Metaphysicae librum* Λ (lost). Taken together, these Porphyrian commentaries on Aristotle already contain most of the reading

32 Translation based on R. Bodéüs 2008, *Porphyre, Commentaire aux Catégories d'Aristote*, p. 85.

33 Cf. below, note 38, p. 66, and for more details on the *skopos* of the *Categories* according to Porphyry, cf. p. 105 with note 147.

34 P. Moraux 1985, "Porphyre, commentateur de la *Physique* d'Aristote", demonstrates that Porphyry had provided a detailed commentary on the first four books of the treatise, whereas for the last four he had been content to write a kind of summary of Aristotle's text.

program of the later Aristotelian cycle, which Marinus[35] calls 'the lesser mysteries', a cycle that served as an introduction to the 'greater mysteries', or cycle of selected works by Plato. As in the later Aristotelian cycle, Porphyry omits the works on natural science.[36]

By way of a conclusion, I would say: it is Porphyry who gave a decisive impetus to the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, decisive in the sense that beginning with him, this tendency remained alive in the ancient world, as we shall see, until the end of Neoplatonism. The only variant in the whole history of this tendency is the degree of this harmonization, greater or lesser. Compared to the Aristotelianizing Middle Platonists, Porphyry shares with them the belief that the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle are *grosso modo* not only compatible, but even complementary; but he differs from them by emphasizing as much as he thought possible the common ontological perspective of the two philosophers, "in which the different discourses apply to different levels of reality" (M. Zambon, op. cit., p. 328). This does not prevent him from sometimes strongly emphasizing incompatibilities, if he finds any. The result, and this holds true for the entire history of this tendency toward harmonization, beginning with Porphyry, is a certain 'Neoplatonization' of Aristotle's philosophy, and, to a lesser degree, an 'Aristotelianization' of Plato's thought.

2 Iamblichus (3rd/4th Century)

Like Porphyry, Iamblichus never taught either at Alexandria or at Athens, but both of them deeply influenced the later Neoplatonism in these two cities and elsewhere. A student of Porphyry, among others, Iamblichus, like him, wrote commentaries both on the dialogues of Plato (on the *First Alcibiades*, the *Phaedo*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*, the *Philebus*, the *Timaeus*, and the *Parmenides*, all lost), and on treatises by Aristotle (on the *Categories*, the *Prior Analytics*, and very probably also on the *De interpretatione*, all lost). Simplicius[37] tells us he made use of a work by Iamblichus on book *Lambda* of the

35 Cf. Marinus, *Proclus ou sur le Bonheur*, § 13, p. 15 Saffrey-Segonds.

36 Cf. I. Hadot, "La division néoplatonicienne des écrits d'Aristote", in I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, pp. 63–93.

37 For the attribution by C. Steel 1997, *'Simplicius', On Aristotle On the Soul*, to Priscianus of the commentary on the *De anima* ascribed by all the manuscripts to Simplicius, see below, notes 44, p. 68 and note 51, p. 71, p. 163 with note 340 and specially I. Hadot 2014, *Le neoplatonicien Simplicius à la lumière des recherches contemporaines*, p. 187–218.

Metaphysics,[38] and he transmitted his views on the *skopos* (goal) of the *De caelo*, a treatise with which Iamblichus also concerned himself to some extent. As we have seen above (pp. 45–48), Iamblichus and Porphyry differed somewhat in their views on the philosophy of Pythagoras and of philosophy in general. I cite D.J. O'Meara:[39] "Certainly Porphyry tended to Pythagoreanize Platonism and Platonists (Plotinus), and also brought Aristotle into the Neoplatonic curriculum. But in the evidence concerning him there is no equivalent to Iamblichus' rigorous reduction of all in Plato and all he thought good in Aristotle to Pythagoreanism. Such a reduction was greatly facilitated by the availability of supposedly Pythagorean works that Iamblichus took to prove the dependence of Plato and Aristotle on Pythagoreanism, although in fact they were cribbed from Plato and Aristotle. In this way Pythagoras assumes a dominant role in Greek philosophy such as he does not appear to have in Porphyry. And as the Egyptians and Chaldaeans are original revelatory sources for all mankind, so Pythagoras is for Greek philosophy". Since Iamblichus thus considered the philosophy of Plato to be almost second-hand, the philosophy of Aristotle, Plato's student, could only be third-hand, but both philosophers were indispensable for reconstructing the parts of the philosophy of Pythagoras on which no Pythagorean writings were to be found.

This attitude on Iamblichus' part is well expressed in a text by Simplicius that describes the relations between Porphyry's commentary on the *Categories* and the commentary by Iamblichus, as well as between Iamblichus' commentary and his own:[40]

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38 The text is as follows: Simplicius, *In De anima*, p. 217, 23–28 Hayduck: Τί μὲν καὶ ποῖος ὁ χωριστὸς τῶν ψυχῶν νοῦς εὐκαιρότερον ἡμῖν καὶ τελειότερον ἐν τοῖς εἰς τὸ λάβδα τῆς Μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ γεγραμμένοις ἑπομένως ταῖς Ἰαμβλίχου περὶ αὐτοῦ κατὰ τὸν Ἀριστοτέλους σκοπὸν (in conformity with Aristotle's goal) θεωρίαις περιφιλοσόφηται. We have already discussed (pp. 29 ff.) the importance which the Neoplatonists, beginning with Porphyry, attributed to the definition of the goal of all the Aristotelian treatises that were part of their reading curricula. Among the late Neoplatonists, the definition of the goal was an obligatory part of the six points to be discussed prior to reading the various treatises: cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, pp. 21–47. The definition of the goal, together with the other introductory points, guided the students toward an oriented reading of Aristotle's works, so that they approached them from a specific, preconceived perspective. Ph. Soulier 2010, *De l'illimité à l'infini*, p. 394 ff., has given a detailed analysis of the exegetical function of the general *skopos* of Aristotle's *Physics*, of the particular *skopos* of book III, and of the *skopos* of the discussion of the *apeiron* in Simplicius.

39 D.J. O'Meara 1989, *Pythagoras Revived. Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, Oxford 1989, p. 102 ff.

40 Simplicius, *In Cat*., pp. 2,5–25 and pp. 3,3–10, quoted in the translation by M. Chase 2003, *Simplicius. On Aristotle Categories 1–4*, pp. 5–9 Kalbfleisch.

After these men it was Porphyry, cause of all that is good for us, who composed—not without labor—a complete explanation of the book, containing the resolution of all objections, in seven books addressed to Gedalius. He also included in this work an account of many of the doctrines of the Stoics, in so far as they were dealing with the same themes.

After Porphyry, the divine Iamblichus also devoted a lengthy treatise to this book. For the most part, he followed Porphyry right down to the letter, but he picked out some things and articulated them in order to make them more clear. At the same time, he contracted the scholastic long-windedness Porphyry had used against the objections; and he applied his Intellective Theory everywhere, to almost all of the chapter-headings. In addition, he also added something else to his writing which was useful: for even before Aristotle, the Pythagorean Archytas, in the book he entitled *On the All*,[41] had already divided the primary genera into ten, and had clearly explained, with the help of examples, their distinctive tokens (*gnôrismata*), and had indicated the order (*taxis*) they occupy with regard to one another, and the specific differences of each [genus], as well as their common and individual properties. Iamblichus, then, adduced the considerations of Archytas in the appropriate places, unfolding that which had been intellectively concentrated, and demonstrating their accord (*sumphônian*) with the doctrines of Aristotle. If there happened to be anything discordant between them—there are few such instances—then he brought these differences, too, to the attention of lovers of knowledge; nor did he leave the cause of the discord unexamined. Rightly so, for it is obvious that Aristotle always wants to remain faithful to Archytas. … Since, then, there has been so much interest in the *Categories* on the part of the most illustrious philosophers, I should straight away appear ridiculous for having dared to have written something myself as well, unless I were to show that the cause of my audacity was reasonable. Now, I have read some of the aforementioned writings, and following Iamblichus as carefully as possible, I wrote them down, often even using the philosopher's very words.[42] My goal (*skopos*) in

41 Cf. above, pp. 43–45.

42 The Greek of this very important sentence reads as follows: ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐνέτυχον μὲν καί τισι τῶν εἰρημένων συγγράμμασιν, ἐπιμελέστερον δὲ ὡς οἷός τε ἦν τοῖς Ἰαμβλίχου παρακολουθῶν ἀπεγραψάμην, καὶ αὐτῇ πολλαχοῦ τῇ λέξει τοῦ φιλοσόφου χρησάμενος. Since I find Chase's translation of ἀπεγραψάμην by "I wrote them down" not literal enough, I propose: "For

> making this copy [ἀπογραφή] was, in the first place, to obtain, through the act of writing, as accurate a comprehension (*katanoêsis*) as possible of what had been said. At the same time, I wished to reduce this man's lofty spirit,[43] inaccessible to the common people, until it was more clear and commensurate [with the common understanding]. Thirdly, I also wanted to reduce somewhat the vast multitude of variegated writings; not, as the most philosophical Syrianus did, to an absolute minimum [εἰς ἐλάχιστον], but as far as was compatible with omitting nothing necessary.

Beside the fact that it informs us about the mode of composition of ancient commentators—even if it was an oral commentary, each author used the material furnished by his predecessors as his basis[44]—this text is very clear about the role attributed to Aristotle: Aristotle's agreement with the so-called Pythagorean Archytas, and hence also with Plato and Pythagoras, is guaranteed in principle. If, however, there was disagreement, which was rare, the fault could only lie with Aristotle, who turned away from the doctrine of Pythagoras out of lack of understanding, or else because of the time that had elapsed between himself and the divine revelation through the lips of Pythagoras. The

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my part, I have of course read some of the works I have just mentioned, but, following Iamblichus' commentary more attentively and to the extent that I was capable, and frequently using this philosopher's very text, I made a copy of it (ἀπεγραψάμην)".

43 As already suggested by the editor Kalbfleisch in his *Addenda*, one must read τὸ ὑψηλονοῦν instead of τὸν ὑψηλόν νοῦν; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*, 270 A

44 The result of this method was the occurrence of numerous textual parallels and the use of some identical examples in the various authors. Cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, fasc. I; C. Luna et alii 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, fasc. III (*Philosophia Antiqua* LI) Leiden–New York–København–Köln 1990; C. Luna *et alii* 2001, Simplicius, *Commentaire sur les Catégories d'Aristote, ch. 2–4*, Paris 2001: these works undertake a detailed comparison, paragraph by paragraph, of Simplicius' commentary with all the other Neoplatonic commentaries on the the same subject that have come down to us, viz. the commentaries by Porphyry, Dexippus, Boethius, Ammonius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus and David (Elias). It was, among other reasons, the discovery of these numerous parallels among the various Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories*, written or pronounced by different authors, that led me to reject both A. Busse's hypothetical attribution of the commentary on Aristotle's *Categories* by David to Elias (cf. above, note 151, p. 52), and the attribution by C. Steel (cf. above, note 37, p. 65, and below, note 51, p. 71, as well as p. 163 with note 340 and especially I. Hadot 2014, p. 187–218) of Simplicius' commentary on the *De anima* to Priscianus, attributions which are based to a large extent on textual parallels.

factor of time as the cause of the corruption of divine revelations is strongly emphasized in Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*, and this idea must also lie in the background of a text from Iamblichus' commentary of the *Categories*, where a disagreement between Archytas and Aristotle has just been observed:[45]

> … the Peripatetic[46] opinion seems to have deviated from the Pythagorean instruction. The reason for this is that the recent [thinkers] have not held the same view of number and movement as the ancients, but think that they are accidents, and consider them to be externally adventitious, whereas [the ancients] regard them as substantial.

These few texts, together with those cited at p. 45 ff. suffice to show that for Iamblichus, the subordinate but nevertheless very important role of Aristotle as compared to Pythagoras or Plato remained the same as it had been for some Middle Platonists. Another observation also becomes necessary: if the disagreements between Aristotle and Plato, and Aristotle and the Pythagoreans, respectively, remain minimal at the level of the *Categories* and of Aristotle's other logical treatises, one would expect them to increase in number and significance when it comes to commenting on treatises of a higher ontological level, such as the *De anima* and the *Metaphysics*, especially when Aristotle, in the latter work, openly attacked some doctrines of the Pythagoreans and of Plato. In this latter case, it seems obvious to me that Iamblichus (like every Neoplatonist, moreover), could only choose between two attitudes: he could either refuse to take up the challenge, that is, fail to comment on the passages in question; or else he could defend the Pythagoreans and Plato, even if he usually went rather far along the road to harmonization. If we can believe David (Elias) and Philoponus, Iamblichus was of the opinion that Aristotle had even accepted the Platonic doctrine of the Ideas,[47] an interpretation of which they disapprove. Philoponus informs us of the dissent that reigned among the "coryphes" of the Neoplatonists over the question of whether or not Aristotle had attacked the doctrine of Ideas proposed by Plato himself, or had merely opposed those Platonists who were interpreting Plato's texts wrongly. Philoponus does not name the person who maintains the agreement between Aristotle and Plato on the

45 Quotation of Iamblichus by Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 351,4–8, Kalbfleisch cited in the translation by R. Gaskin 2000, *Simplicius, On Aristotle, Categories 9–15*, London, p. 84.

46 Here, the term 'Peripatetic' probably refers to Aristotle's school during his lifetime.

47 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 123,1–3. Philoponus, *De aet. mundi*, pp. 29,2–5; 31,7 ff. and 32,10–18 Rabe.

doctrine of Ideas—judging by David (Elias) it was Iamblichus—but he gives a textual citation of the first chapter to Proclus' book entitled *Examination of Aristotle's objections concerning Plato's Timaeus*, in which Proclus declares that Aristotle had fought against the very doctrine of Ideas. It is all the more surprising, Philoponus continues, that despite Proclus' objections, there are still partisans of the hypothesis that Plato and Aristotle agreed "on this point as well", that is, on the subject of the Ideas. He goes on to say that those who were born after them (sc. after the coryphes, viz. Proclus and, judging by David [Elias], Iamblichus), naturally followed the leaders of their own schools. Iamblichus must have placed Plato and Aristotle in agreement on the automotricity of the soul as well, as is suggested by the agreement between passages from Themistius and Simplicius.[48]

Another late testimony concerning Iamblichus' resolutely harmonizing method is provided by Stephanus of Alexandria:[49]

> "Note", says Iamblichus, "that he [Aristotle] has said [of the soul that it is] 'like a tablet' and not 'like a papyrus leaf': but one does not speak of a tablet unless it bears letters on it. If, therefore, Aristotle expressed himself in this way, it is because he would have it that the soul of children—that is, the potential intellect[50]—contains the reasons of things. Consequently, if [Aristotle] compared the soul to a tablet, it is obviously because it contains the reasons of things (λόγοι τῶν πραγμάτων), just as a tablet contains letters. And if he spoke of an unwritten tablet (in the sense of 'badly written'), it is because it contains letters that are minuscule and invisible (just as we say of an actor who recites his part badly that he has no voice). Consequently, says [Iamblichus], Aristotle, like Plato,

48 Cf. above, p. 59 with note 16, and below, pp. 165–169.

49 Stephanus of Alexandria (?) = Philoponus, *In De anima*, III, p. 533,20–35 Hayduck, translation based on that by A. Segonds 1986, *Proclus, Sur le Premier Alcibiade de Platon*, pp. 435–436, as slightly modified by D.P. Taormina, "Dynamique de l'écriture et processus cognitif dans le néoplatonisme", in M. Dixsaut (ed.), *Contre Platon 1. Le platonisme dévoilé*, Paris 1993, p. 225 f.

50 I am afraid that this identification, which seems to be by Stephanus, is not correct, for we learn from Simplicius (*In De an.*, p. 313, 1–6 Hayduck) that Iamblichus identified potential intellect and intellect in act with an intellect higher than the soul: or with the intellect that defines the soul (νοῦς ὁριστικὸς τῆς ψυχῆς), or with the unparticipated intellect (ἀμέθεκτος νοῦς). As Simplicius himself points out, this interpretation differs from his own, which was, as we shall see, current from Themistius at least, and which assimilates potential intellect and intellect in act to the rational human soul.

> is also of the opinion that the intelligibles are present within the soul, along with the reasons of all things, and that there is, not knowledge, but reminiscence.» This is what Iamblichus has said to show that Aristotle is in agreement with Plato.

On the same subject, that is, Iamblichus' opinion on Aristotle's *De anima*, we are lucky enough to possess another source, which is both explicit and implicit. In his commentary on the *De anima*, which I have cited in the previous note, Simplicius assures the reader that he wishes to solve the questions that are hard to interpret by following the opinions Iamblichus had expressed in his own writings (Simplicius, *In De anima*, p. 1,18–20 Hayduck). At p. 217,23–28, Simplicius[51] mentions the interpretation Iamblichus gave "in conformity with Aristotle's goal (σκοπός)"[52] of the Aristotelian χωριστὸς νοῦς, an interpretation which testifies to a Neoplatonic exegesis of the same type as Porphyry's on book Λ of the *Metaphysics*, which we have discussed above.[53] As we mentioned in note 50, p. 70, despite some differences, the same kind of interpretation on Iamblichus' part is also predominant at *In De anima* p. 312 ff., with regard to Aristotle's δυνάμει νοῦς and ἐνεργείᾳ νοῦς, an interpretation which, exceptionally, does not correspond to that of Simplicius. The entire deliberately harmonizing interpretation of Simplicius' commentary, moreover, which may be considered, according to his own declarations, as in conformity with the thought of Iamblichus, except for a few exceptions which he carefully indicates, is a high-wire act that consists in Platonizing Aristotle and in Aristotelianizing Plato. Simplicius justifies his decision to comment on the *De anima*, moreover, by saying (*In De anima*, p. 1,7–14) that it is true that Plato had also transmitted many fine doctrines about the soul, but that they had been sufficiently studied and interpreted in a unanimous way by the exegetes of Plato, whereas there were

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51 In I. Hadot 2002 "Simplicius or Priscianus? On the author of the commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* (*CAG* XI): A methodological study", pp. 159–199, I set forth in detail the reasons that lead me to be unable to follow the opinion of C. Steel (followed by J.O. Urmson 1995, *Simplicius, On Aristotle On the Soul* 1.1–2.4, pp. 2–4), who sees in Priscianus Lydus the author of the commentary on the *De anima* which the manuscripts unanimously attribute to Simplicius. Cf. especially below, note 340, p. 163. The article by M. Perkams 2005, "Priscian of Lydia, commentator on the *De anima* in the tradition of Iamblichus", who also follows the opinion of C. Steel, does not convince me either, for the same reasons. Cf. my highly detailed critique in I. Hadot 2014, *Le néoplatonicien Simplicius à la lumière des recherches contemporaines*, pp. 187–218.

52 Cf. above, n. 38, p. 66.

53 Cf. pp. 60–63.

still, in his day, many discordant interpretations of Aristotle's treatise *De anima*, even though the latter, "according to the opinion of Iamblichus, that best judge of the truth, had brought the study of the soul to its completion": in other words, without Aristotle, the Platonic doctrines on the soul would remain lacunary. We thus find once again, on the testimony of Iamblichus, the traditional idea of the complementarity of the works of Aristotle and Plato, even in the context of delicate philosophical problems.

I have related these few details, taken from Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, which concern Iamblichus' interpretation of book Λ of the *Metaphysics* and his opinions concerning Aristotle's *De anima*, because they do not appear among the rich material collected by B. Dalsgaard Larsen, although they are, by contrast, extensively developed in the excellent article by O. Ballériaux entitled "A la recherche du Jamblique perdu".[54] Yet one of the works that have done most to advance research on Iamblichus, his influence on later Neoplatonists, and his attitude toward Aristotle, is without doubt the book, already mentioned, by D.J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras revived*.[55] From the meticulous research it contains on Iamblichus' great work, partly lost, *On Pythagoreanism*, I shall extract some conclusions concerning the subject that interests us here: Iamblichus' attitude toward Aristotle.

We shall leave aside the first four books of *On Pythagoreanism*, which have been preserved and have a more or less introductory nature, and start with book V, entitled *On the arithmetical science in physical things*, extracts from which are to be found in Psellus, under the title *On physical number*. D.J. O'Meara explains the meaning of this last title as follows: "They [*scil.* the physical numbers] correspond to (Aristotelian) immanent forms and (Stoic) 'seeds' which organize matter and which had been introduced into the Platonic universe by Plotinus and by Platonists before him. To call them 'physical numbers', however, is unusual". According to O'Meara, the plan of this fifth book follows that of books I to IV of Aristotle's *Physics*. I cannot summarize here the detailed analysis of the extracts from Psellus proposed by O'Meara, and I shall limit myself to citing a few phrases from his conclusions:[56] "In his *Physics* Aristotle occasionally criticized the Pythagoreans and Platonists and regarded his own physical theory as superior. Psellus' excerpts contain some indications showing that Iamblichus, far from ignoring Aristotle's criticisms, attempted to come to terms with them. This involved, in some cases at least, interpreta-

54 B. Dalsgaard Larsen 1972, *Jamblique de Chalcis, exégète et philosophe*. O. Ballériaux 1992.

55 D.J. O'Meara 1989.

56 D.J. O'Meara 1989, *Pythagoras Revived*, p. 68 ff.

tion of Pythagorean doctrine so as to render it defensible. This may have led to some projection of Aristotelian physics backwards on to Pythagoreanism. At the same time, however, Iamblichus did not hesitate to go beyond Aristotle, in particular on the object of place. This he did elsewhere, in the case of time, by appealing to a supposedly earlier, Pythagorean source, Archytas. Such advances were a source of inspiration for the sophisticated theories of place and time to be found in later Neoplatonists, Syrianus, Damascius, and Simplicius. More generally, the instances in which Psellus' excerpts have been found to anticipate specific arguments in Simplicius' and Philoponus' commentaries on the *Physics* suggest that Iamblichus' study of the *Physics* was of some importance for the development of these commentaries". Still according to O'Meara, the plan of book VI of *On Pythagoreanism*, entitled *On the arithmetical science in ethics*, broadly follows the plan of Aristotle's ethical treatises, without it being possible to say whether Iamblichus was interested in a particular Aristotelian treatise. I quote once again part of the conclusions drawn by D.J. O'Meara:[57] "Aristotle's influence on the ethics of *On Pythagoreanism* VI has been observed not only in the sequence of topics handled, but also in particular explanations and even in individual expressions. However, Iamblichus attempted to change Aristotelian ethics into a 'Pythagorean' theory. This could be done by emphasizing the mathematical aspects of Aristotle's approach—in particular his discussions of moral virtue in general and of the virtue of justice—or by substituting parts or powers of the soul. Plato's ethics was also introduced as was, of course, Pythagorean numerical lore". With regard to the seventh book, entitled *On the arithmetical science in theology*, with which Psellus' extracts come to an end—books VIII to X are completely lost to us, except for their titles—O'Meara (p. 77 f.) demonstrates that Iamblichus no doubt answered, to some extent, the criticisms formulated by Aristotle in books M–N of his *Metaphysics* against the Platonic theories, especially on the subject of the ideal numbers and the relations between the Good and the One,[58] answers that Syrianus was able to use in his own commentary. We will come across O'Meara's research later on in our paragraph on Syrianus, particularly with regard to the influence exerted by the treatise *On Pythagoreanism* on Syrianus' commentary on the *Metaphysics*.

57 *Pythagoras Revived*, p. 76.

58 Aristotle, *Metaph.*, N, 4, 1091a30 ff.

3 Themistius (circa 317–388)

The location where the career of Themistius, the philosopher and politician, unfolded was Constantinople, where he was a member of the senate and *Praefectus urbis*. Photius transmits the following information on his philosophical work: "Of this Themistius, commentaries (ὑπομνήματα) on all Aristotle's works are in circulation: not only this, but, we have seen paraphrases (μεταφράσεις) by him, which shorten to what is useful [the content] of the *Analytics*, of the book *On the soul*, and of the *Physics*, and of other works of the same kind. Exegetical works by him also exist on the works of Plato, and, in a word, he is a passionate and zealous lover of philosophy".[59] We still possess his paraphrases of the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Physics*, and the *De anima*; while paraphrases of the *De caelo* and book 12 (Λ) of the *Metaphysics* have come down to us only in Hebrew and Arabic translations. An overview of the widespread diffusion of Themistius' works throughout the Syriac and Arab has been provided by R. Brague.[60]

Not long ago, Themistius was still unanimously counted among the Peripatetic philosophers; among the last scholars to defend this viewpoint were the late H.J. Blumenthal et R. Brague.[61] It was E.P. Mahoney[62] and above all O. Ballériaux[63] who, independently of one another, pointed out unquestionably Neoplatonic features of his interpretation of Aristotle. Still more recently, R. Sorabji[64] has judged, with regard to Themistius, "that he does side with contemporary Neoplatonism too much to be considered a member of the Peripatetic, i.e. Aristotelian school, e.g. requiring Platonic Forms to explain biological reproduction (so Devin Henry[65] …) and rejecting Aristotle's empiristic

59 Photius, *Library*, codex 74, 52a15–21, vol. I, p. 153 Henry.

60 R. Brague 1999, *Thémistius, Paraphrase de la* Métaphysique *d'Aristote* (*livre Lambda*), pp. 11–34.

61 H.J. Blumenthal 1979, "Themistius, the Last Peripatetic Commentator on Aristotle?", pp. 391–400. R. Brague, *Thémistius, Paraphrase* …, for instance p. 25.

62 E.P. Mahoney 1982, "Neoplatonism, the Greek Commentators and Renaissance Aristotelianism", especially the long note 1, and by the same author, 1973, "Themistius and the Agent Intellect in James of Viterbo and Other Thirteenth Century Philosophers", p. 428.

63 O. Ballériaux 1943, *D'Aristote à Thémistius. Contribution à une histoire de la noétique après Aristote*, (Dissertation) Liège 1943; by the same author, 1989 "Thémistius et l'exégèse de la noétique aristotélicienne"; *idem*, 1994, "Thémistius et le néoplatonisme. Le νοῦς παθητικός et l'immortalité de l'âme".

64 Preface by R. Sorabji 2003, in *Themistius, On Aristotle Physics 4*, translated by R.B. Todd (*Ancient Commentators on Aristotle*), p. VII.

65 R. Sorabji alludes here to the article by D. Henry 2003, "Themistius and spontaneous generation in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*".

account of concept formation (in DA 3,31–4,11)". R.B. Todd expresses a similar opinion in the introduction to his partial translation of Themistius' *Paraphrase* of Aristotle's *De anima* (3, 4–8).[66] It seems to me necessary to delve into this question more deeply.

3.1 *The* Speeches

To be persuaded that Themistius was indeed a Neoplatonist, and, what interests us most in the present context, a convinced defender of the agreement between Plato and Aristotle[67] (a concrete example of his method of harmonization has been given above, pp. 56–60), it would almost suffice to read the *Speeches* of Themistius, particularly those that are customarily called *Private Speeches* (*Orat.* XX–XXXIV). Already *Speech* XX, a funeral oration in honor of his father Eugenius, who was also a philosopher and the son of a philosopher, and who taught in Paphlagonia, contains information that we can, without hesitation, transpose to Themistius himself, since the letter mentions more or less the same details with regard to himself in his other *Speeches*, but in a much more fragmentary way. After having said (*Orat.* XX, 234b–d), alluding broadly to Plato's *Phaedrus*, that his father, having always known how to harmonize the movements of the two horses of his chariot, was therefore able to rise straight up to heaven, where he was immediately placed in the company of Socrates and of Plato by the two judges Rhadamanthus and Minos, who were careful to bring to him his favorite as well, the divine[68] Aristotle, he adds (235c[69]):

> nevertheless, my father helped to open up all the shrines of the sages. He was of those who were fully initiated in the sacred knowledge that Pythagoras of Samos brought back to Greece from Egypt and in what Zeno

66 R.B. Todd 1990, *Two Greek Aristotelian Commentators on the Intellect*, p. 34 (with note 114).

67 As I will explain below, I do not share the opinion of R.J. Penella 2000, *The Private Orations of Themistius*, p. 13, for whom "the marriage of Aristotelianism and Platonism in Eugenius and Themistius is a distinctive one, subordinating Plato to Aristotle, in contrast to Neoplatonism's subordination of Aristotle to Plato".

68 The epithets or attributes given to Plato are the following: at *Oratio* II,31b and XX,235c: μέγας (great); II,32b, IV,62d, VIII,107c and XV,189a: θεῖος (divine); II,34b, 40a, IV,60a and XXI,250c: πάνσοφος (of full-fledged wisdom); VI,81a, VII,91c, X,130d and 141b, XVII,215b, XVIII,224b, XXIII,287d and 297b; XXVI,314d, XXIX,345c, XXXIV,V (24): θεσπέσιος (emanating from the gods, divine); VIII,107c: αἰδοῖος (venerable); IX,124a: κλεινός (illustrious); XXI,245c and 247d, XXIX,347c: σοφός; XXVI,318c: πάμμεγας (immense). For Aristotle: *Oratio* IX,124a: θεσπέσιος (emanating from the gods, divine); XX,234d: θεῖος (divine).

69 Text quoted in the translation, slightly modified, by R.J. Penella 2000, *The Private Orations of Themistius*, p. 54.

of Citium later taught in the Painted Stoa.[70] He always displayed the works of the great Plato right at the door[71] and in the very temple precinct. When passing to the Academy from the Lyceum,[72] he did not change his clothes, he would often first make a sacrifice [προθύσας] to Aristote and then end by worshipping Plato. He always got angry at those who actually tried to build a dividing wall between the two [sacred] enclosures and to separate them. For he felt that Aristotle's philosophy is an excellent preliminary rite [προτέλειον] to Plato's frenzy [τῆς Πλάτωνος βακχείας = literally: to

70 The mention of Zeno is not the sign of any kind of eclecticism on Eugenius' part that would be anything other than the general 'syncretism' (see above, p. 44) of the Neoplatonists. A more or less brief survey of the philosophies of the competing schools was customary at the beginning of instruction. Themistius himself often names Zeno of Citium in his speeches, along with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The fact is universally recognized today that Neoplatonism had integrated a large number of Stoic doctrines, while transposing them. According to the Platonists themselves, however, the procedure was the reverse: as is very well formulated by G.E. Karamanolis 2006, *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement?*, p. 21, they believed "that in the Aristotelian or the Stoic writings they read nothing but Plato in a more dogmatic form", since Zeno and Aristotle were both disciples of Plato, one directly, the other indirectly. Let us also recall that the late Neoplatonist Simplicius had written a commentary of a completely Neoplatonic nature on the *Handbook* by the Stoic Epictetus: cf. I. and P. Hadot 2004, *Apprendre à philosopher dans l'Antiquité. L'enseignement du "Manuel d'Épictète" et son commentaire néoplatonicien*.

71 Τὰ Πλάτωνος … τοῦ μεγάλου ἀγχίθυρά τε ἀεὶ ἐπεδείκνυε. R.J. Penella adds after 'door' "[of Aristotle's 'temple']", but I do not think that this explanatory remark gets to the true meaning. In my opinion, the temple in question is that of Plato's philosophy, and the expressions 'near the door' and 'in the very precinct of the temple' are allusions to a Platonic cursus organized according to the level of difficulty of a chosen number of Plato's dialogues, as for instance the one proposed by Iamblichus, which consisted in a selection of twelve dialogues divided into two groups, the 'physical' dialogues and the 'theological' dialogues, with the former group serving as a preparation for the second, which contained the most lofty doctrines. That we have to do shortly afterwards with two temples, one of Platonic philosophy and the other of Aristotelian philosophy, will be confirmed a bit farther on, when mention is made of "two [sacred] enclosures". That the entire Platonic cycle, the 'greater mysteries', was in its turn preceded by the 'lesser mysteries', the Neoplatonic cursus of the works of Aristotle, is indicated by the verb προθύσας of the following sentence.

72 Μεταβαίνων εἰς τὴν Ἀκαδημίαν ἐκ τοῦ Λυκείου: R.J. Penella 2000, *The Private Orations …*, p. 54, translates incorrectly "from the Academy to the Lyceum", a translation which corresponds to his personal view (cf. above, note 67, p. 75), but which falsifies the thought of Themistius and his father, for whom the Aristotelian cursus was merely a preparatory stage for the Platonic cursus, despite the fact that both of them felt closer to Aristotle: cf. below, p. 80 ff.

> Plato's Bacchic transport] and, at the same time, a defensive wall and safeguard for it. Plato's philosophy is still too accessible, still assailable by sophists, he thought; Aristotle provided fortifications for him, fenced him in on all sides, and kept his teachings [δόγματα] from being assailed by plots. Many people, he felt, because of their own inaction and laxity, are unprotected and enter the contest before being rubbed with oil. … My father, then, never quarreled with the wise Plato, nor did he think that Aristotle ever did so lightly.

This passage clearly shows that Themistius' father was already convinced, not only of the agreement between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, but also of the latter's preparatory nature. Aristotle's philosophy is a "preliminary ceremony" for the main ceremony, the philosophy of Plato. Despite his preference for Aristotle, Eugenius was not a Peripatetic, for Themistius emphasizes that his father did not change his (priestly) robe when he went from the Lyceum, that is, the school of Aristotle, to Plato's school the Academy,[73] and he evokes the respective philosophies of these schools through the image of temples, with their ceremonies and their statues. He could therefore hardly be anything other than a Neoplatonist, since K. Praechter's theory that a certain kind of pre-Plotinian Platonism was still manifested with Hierocles of Alexandria and in Simplicius' commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus, is no longer valid today.[74] Even more generally, one may say that at the end of the third century of our era, we no longer possess any indication suggesting that forms of Platonism other than Neoplatonism still survived. With regard to Themistius himself, the presence of Neoplatonic elements in his exegesis of Aristotle is undeniable. In contrast, although considerable importance is attributed to Pythagoras, it is not certain that Eugenius saw in Plato mainly the propagator of Pythagoras' philosophy, as did Iamblichus (who was probably the teacher of Eugenius[75]), and

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73 Cf. (in I. Hadot et *alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, fasc. 1, p. 124ff.) what the late Neoplatonists say about one of the ten points to be dealt with previously, contained in the first introductory scheme to the commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*. It concerned the qualities required of a good exegete: one must not change one's attitude, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) declare, as actors do when they interprets various roles, nor, as David (Elias) explains, become an Aristotelian when commenting on Aristotle, and a Platonist when commenting on Plato, saying, in the former case, that there is no philosopher comparable to Aristotle, and, in the latter, that there is no philosopher like Plato. Cf. below, p. 141.

74 Cf. below, n. 130, p. 99.

75 Cf. O. Ballériaux 2000, article 'Eugénios', p. 306ff. and O. Ballériaux 1996.

many Neoplatonists after him. The intentional obscurity (ἀσάφεια) of Aristotle's works, mentioned at 235a, along with Eugenius' belief that Homer was "the ancestor and origin of the teaching of Plato and Aristotle" (236b) are *Leitmotivs* of Neoplatonic philosophy[76] until its end.

We now come to Themistius himself. Of his properly philosophical works, we can read only some of his *Paraphrases* of works by Aristotle, while his

76 The supposed intentional obscurity of style played an important role in the Neoplatonic division of Aristotle's works contained in the introductions to the commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* by the late Neoplatonists: cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les* Catégories, chapters III ("La division néoplatonicienne des écrits d'Aristote"), VII ("Le type d'expression dans les écrits d'Aristote") and VIII ("Les raisons de l'obscurité d'Aristote"), as well as the discussion below pp. 136–139. The first appearance of this motif referring to Aristotle's works is found, as far as I know, in Aulus Gellius (2nd century AD), *Noctes Atticae*, XX, 5, who relies on a letter by [Pseudo]-Aristotle to Alexander, which he cites, and which he had found in the edition of Aristotle's works by Andronicus of Rhodes (1st century BC). This obscurity was deliberate, it was thought, continuing an authentic or supposedly Pythagorean pedagogical tradition, because it was not desirable that true philosophical doctrines should fall into the hands of people unworthy of them. Aristotle was thus thought to hide by obscurity that which Plato hid by myths, and the Pythagoreans, among others, by symbols or enigmas. Themistius says about his father (at 239a) that he knew how to recognize the person who was worthy of having the statues revealed to him (i.e. the statues inside the temple of Aristotle's philosophy): cf., on this subject, Synesius' *Letter* CXLIII. Themistius develops this theme in his *Oratio* XXVI 319c ff. (cited in the translation by R.J. Penella 2000, *The Private Orations of Themistius*, p. 149 ff.): "The notion that the same writings are not beneficial both to the general public and to philosophers is also distinctive of Aristotle, … And so Aristotle called one class of writings 'external' [θυραίους: generally called ἐξωτερικοί = remark by I. Hadot] and let them circulate without restraint, but the other class of writings he kept inside [generally called ἐσωτερικοί = remark by I. Hadot] his school and shared, cautiously, only with a few. The bars that [when unfastened] give access to his teachings and [when fastened] deny access are in the hands of clarity and abstruseness [ἀσάφεια]; and to clarity and abstruseness, as if to the Hours, have been entrusted the tasks of making an opening in the cloud for his audience [i.e., in the 'external' writings] and, contrarily, of placing that obstructing cloud above them [in the writings 'kept inside his school']. Those writings of Aristotle that are of general utility and were designed for a broad audience [i.e., the 'external writings'] are truly full of light and radiance. … But as for the mystical part of Aristotle's corpus [i.e., that 'kept inside the school'], in which the perfect rites are to be found [ἐν ᾧ τὰ τέλη], he saw to it that, even though the uninitiated have access to it, it is not really theirs. Therefore, although these mystical writings toss themselves at our feet, they are at the same time secured with more defenses than the royal palace at Ecbatana". As far as Homer is concerned, he was regarded as a precursor of Plato throughout the history of Neoplatonism.

"exegetical works on Plato's writings", which were still known to Photius,[77] are lost to us. We will return to the Neoplatonic features contained in these philosophical works. His speeches, however, generally neglected by historians of philosophy, already contain enough information to allow us to evaluate his philosophical position. Let us begin with material indications, which cannot be decisive in themselves. Judging by the indices, Themistius' *Speeches* name Plato much more often than Aristotle, and when both are mentioned together, which is often the case, it is always Plato who precedes. As is shown by the list of epithets and attributes provided at note 68, p. 75, there are 27 for Plato and only two for Aristotle, although they are on the same honorific level. Above all, the *Speeches* testify to Themistius' familiarity with the works of Plato. A few examples: we have already mentioned the use of Plato's *Phaedrus* in *Speech* XX; *Speech* XXI (*Basanistes*) has as its theme the definition and description of the authentic philosopher, a description that is built around a series of quotations from Plato's *Republic*; in *Speech* XXIII (*Sophistes*), Themistius bases himself largely on Plato's *Sophist*. The *Speeches* also testify to the fact that Themistius, like his father, always linked the teaching of Plato's philosophy to that of Aristotle: in *Speech* IV (to Constantius), he mentions (at 54b) a speech given previously in honor of Constantius, in which he had arranged in a garland "pure flowers gathered from the fields of Plato and Aristotle". The fields of philosophy once again come up in *Speech* XXXII (*On metriopathy*) at 357a–d: a highly effective medicinal herb grows there, of which one must gather a large quantity in the precincts both of Plato and of Aristotle. One must then grind up the two quantities, mix them in the *crater* of memory, and use the mixture as a kind of ointment. Overall, this is a pretty metaphor of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle considered as complementary. An identical view is expressed, among other places, in following quotations: in *Speech* IX (*Protreptic* addressed to Valentinian the Younger, for whose education he was responsible), Themistius says (124a): "Together with me, the illustrious Plato and the divine Aristotle will instruct you"; while at 126d he affirms: "If you confide yourself to Plato and Aristotle, while you are still walking on earth, they will lead you on high toward the temples of the kingdom of heaven; they will make you visit the ordering up above, and will initiate you into the mysteries of that world". Toward the end of *Speech* XXIII (*Sophistes*), after making ample use of Plato's *Sophist*, Themistius tells (at 298c–d) how, during his stay at Rome (in 357) as representative of the city of Constantinople, the Romans had tried everything they could think of to keep him in their city for a while, so that

77 Cf. above, p. 74.

he could "open up for them the long-closed sacred places of Pythagoras, as well as the temples of Plato and Aristotle, and show them the statues they contain". Toward the end of *Speech* XIX (to Theodosius), we read: "Before you, I would not wish to keep singing the words of Plato nor, by Zeus, those of Aristotle, nor set forth my own opinions or admonitions …", while *Speech* XXXIII once again expresses (at 366c) his familiarity with both philosophers: "Since I am constantly in the company (συνὼν) of the divine Plato, spend my life (συνδιαιτώμενος) with Aristotle, and tenaciously hold on to Homer, do not be surprised if only seldom I mount the [orator's] stage and go to the assemblies".

If, in the last analysis, Themistius feels closer to Aristotle than to Plato, this inclination is first of all the result of his choice of a specific form of life: that of a man who takes part in public life, uses his body as an instrument, and trains himself, according to the hierarchy of Neoplatonic virtues in effect since Porphyry, on the level of Aristotelian metriopathy[78] (which is, moreover, the subject of Themistius' *Speech* XXXII):

> I have followed the most esteemed of the ancient philosophers, says Themistius (*Speech* XXXI [On his Presidency of the Senate], 352c), those who teach that there are two philosophical itineraries, one which is more divine and the other more useful for public affairs. In preferring the one that is more advantageous for you to that which examines what is proper to me [that is, proper to mankind: according to Plato, this is the soul; according to the Neoplatonists, the rational soul], I have chosen following Socrates, Aristotle and the Seven Sages, the philosophy that is practiced in public life.

In *Speech* XXXIV, 30, he defends himself as follows against those who accuse him of having accepted an official position, although he was a philosopher. He advises them

> … not to take Plato too literally when, in his *Republic* [book VII], he applies to those who 'descend' from the consideration of divine things toward

78 Cf. Porphyry, *Sent.* 32, p. 23,4–8 Lamberz: "The virtues of the politician are based on *metriopatheia*; they consist in following the rational principles of duty in one's activities. This is why they are called 'political', by the fact that they refer to life in a group and a community, since their goal is a life in common that does not harm to others. …". This lower level of the 'political' virtues corresponds to a psychic state in which the soul is still turned away from its true being, because it is turned toward corporeal and sensible reality, which is inferior to it, and it must therefore make use of the passions to a certain extent.

> the consideration of human affairs this verb ['descend'] in a somewhat condescending way, nor to believe that it is something insignificant to take part in public affairs, but to think that 'upwards' and 'downwards' are not simple concepts. Epicurus is certainly insignificant, as is anyone who is a partisan of Epicurus and admires carnal pleasures, but Plato is always above, as is whoever follows Plato and tends to become similar to God. As for me, however, I am between the two, being content if I am sometimes above and sometimes below; and in my case, being below does not mean being completely below, but to depend on what is above (ἄνωθεν ἐξῆπται) and be guided.

Themistius means that even when he makes use of desire, which represents the lowest part of the tripartite Platonic soul, he nevertheless always obeys reason, its highest part.[79] At the same time, however, this text refers explicitly to the allegory of the cave in the seventh book of Plato's *Republic* and its twofold motion: the ascending movement, which delivers the prisoner from the darkness of ignorance and opinion and makes him emerge from the cave toward the light of knowledge, and the descending movement, which makes the former prisoner, now a philosopher, return to the cave, so that he can place his knowledge in the service of his fellow detainees. It is exactly this role that Themistius intended to play at Constantinople when fortune gave him the opportunity, which happened at least twice in his life. The two emperors Constantius and Theodosius were ready to accept his advice: the former named him to the Senate, whereas the latter elevated him to the office of City Prefect. And Themistius explicitly evokes Plato to justify his acceptance of these positions: "I shall bring

79 Cf. the late Neoplatonist Olympiodorus, *In Gorg*., *Prooem*., pp. 4,11–5,4, Westerink, on the subject of 'political happiness' (πολιτικὴ εὐδαιμονία): "We say that the matter [*scil*. of political happiness] is the soul—not the rational soul, but the tripartite soul, for it resembles the division of the city. And just as in cities there are ruler, soldiers and also the labouring class, so too in us: to the ruler there corresponds our reason (λόγος), and to the soldier the drive (θυμός), which is intermediate in as much as it obeys reason, but instructs and organizes the labourers, i.e. desire. So the matter is this tripartite soul, because the statesman will have passions and desires as and when they are necessary or appropriate. For just as the high-pitched string is in tune with the low-pitched string and emits the same tone, only sharper, so too his desire is conjoined (συνάπτεται) with reason". (Text cited in the translation by R. Jackson, K. Lycos and H. Tarrant 1998, *Olympiodorus Commentary on Plato's* Gorgias, p. 58 ff.). As far as Aristotle was concerned, the Neoplatonic reading list concerning political science included: the three *Ethics*, *Economics*, *Politics*, and *Constitutions*; for Plato: the *First Alcibiades*, *Gorgias*, *Republic*, and *Laws*; cf. D.J. O'Meara 2003, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity*.

Plato forward to testify to you … that, in saying yes to the emperor, I was following that famous philosopher's prescriptions".[80]

On the other hand, his preference for Aristotle also comes from the fact that as far as their ultimate goal is concerned, he finds the teachings of Aristotle more adapted to human nature, and therefore more accessible than those of Plato. This opinion already comes to the surface in the text of *Speech* XXXIV, 30 which I have just cited, where it is said that Plato and his followers "tend to become similar to God", which he seems, not without reason, to consider beyond the strength of most people. The same impression emerges from his *Speech* XXXIV, 5 f. (cited in the translation by R.J. Penella, pp. 212 ff.):

> It is a very distinctive feature of Plato's penetrating mind that he links human good to divine good and fashions the human polity, as much as possible, with reference to the polity of the All. This is the purpose of works of his such as the *Republic*, the famous *Laws*, the *Phaedrus*, and the *Gorgias*. This is his purpose in all the works in which he vigorously contends to outdo himself in demonstrating that we should choose justice for what it is and avoid evil for what it is, even if no reward is offered for the former and the latter escapes all punishment. Now does Aristotle differ from Plato in all this? He has a greater curiosity (πολυπραγμοσύνη) and love of detail (λεπτουργία) than Plato, but still there is no part of his philosophical project (πραγματεία) and his cycle[81] (κύκλος) that neglects the question of human good; in fact, his whole philosophy is directed towards the good and has the good as its point of reference. For the essence (τὸ κεφάλαιον) of human happiness, in his view, is our practice of virtue over the whole course of life and the soul's acting in accordance with virtue in formulating its guiding principles [καὶ ψυχῆς ἐνέργεια κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐν προηγουμένοις: I would translate: in agreement with virtue in the main points: cf. *Eth. Nicom.*, I,6,1098,16–18]. We philosophize, he says, not to know justice, but to do justice as far as we can [cf. *Eth. Nicom.*, II,2,1103b27–29]. He has portioned out the good to the soul, to the body and to externals, and he makes human happiness complete by drawing from the first, the second, and the third mixing bowls. He says that, although happiness in an individual person is something desirable, it is greater and fuller when found in the whole city. He therefore calls his method 'political' [cf. *Eth.*

80 *Speech* XXXIV,16, cited in the translation of J. Penella 2000, p. 221.

81 R.J. Penella 2000 translates this word by 'system', but one must understand 'the Aristotelian cycle of Neoplatonic studies'.

> *Nicom.* I, 1094b7–11]. He says that it is impossible to fare well (εὖ πράττειν) without engaging in action (πράττειν), and that the god who guides this whole cosmos and those [divinities] who make the rounds with him are devotees of a practical and political philosophy, who keep the whole of nature steady and unharmed through the course of time.

Here is a final text *Speech* XXXII, 358d–359b [On metriopathy], cited in the translation of R.J. Penella, p. 197 ff. Shortly after speaking of the highly effective medicine obtained by the mixture of herbs growing in the precincts of the temples of Plato and Aristotle (text cited p. 79), thus emphasizing the complementarity of the two philosophers, he nevertheless admits, at least in the field of ethics, his exclusive choice of Aristotle's metriopathy, which, we recall, had become the basis of the first degree of Neoplatonic virtues:

> … I admire many other things about Aristotle, but I especially admire and esteem the wisdom revealed in the fact that his teachings do not distance themselves from the creature (φύσις) about which they are put forth. Rather, they bring help to its weakness and rectify what is deficient in it and provide all possible means by which creatures may reach their best condition. Aristotle's teachings neither overreach nor slight a creature's mean (τὸ μέτρον); nor are they so extremely clever (οὐδὲ οὕτως ἄγαν σοφοί εἰσιν) that they forget, because of that cleverness, that the living being who is the object of their concern has much of the earthly and terrestrial in it, but only a small portion of the divine and heavenly. His teachings are content if they can thoroughly drive off and clear away the many unessential things (οὐκ ἀναγκαῖα) by which the immortal part of a mortal being is burdened. As for what cannot be made to fade away or be washed out, what is deeply impressed and embedded, his teachings are happy if they can at least adorn and beautify these features of mortal beings and suppress their excessive manifestation.

These texts basically take up the evaluations of the methods of Plato and Aristotle that are already known to us from Middle Platonism (cf. above, pp. 52 f.), and were still repeated at the end of Neoplatonism.[82] The evaluations of those Middle Platonists who were hostile to Aristotle were obviously critical of Aristotle, when they laid heavy emphasis on his lack of a theological spirit, whereas those of the last Neoplatonists are rather neutral. Simplicius, for instance, writes:

82 Cf. below, pp. 143–146.

> [Aristotle] always refuses to deviate from nature; on the contrary, he considers even things which are above nature according to their relation to nature, just as, by contrast, the divine Plato, according to Pythagorean usage, examines even natural things insofar as they participate in the things above nature.[83]

Themistius does not criticize Plato, whose superiority in matters of theology goes without saying. On the contrary, he joins the chorus of all the Middle and Neoplatonists who sing of Plato's superiority even as far as logic is concerned.[84] However, owing both to his position as a politician devoted to action and to a realistic perception of his own human means and those of the vast audience to which his speech is addressed, he limits his efforts to obtaining the first degree of Neoplatonic virtues, based on metriopathy, of Aristotelian origin.

Yet Themistius was not the only Neoplatonist who never went beyond the lower level of their system of virtues. The table D.J. O'Meara places at the end of his article "Patterns of Perfection in Damascius' *Life of Isidore*"[85] shows that of the 27 philosophers represented in the (non-exhaustive) table, there are only five who, judging by Damascius' comments, we can believe surpassed the degree of political or civic virtues and progressed more or less far in their transformation to become similar to God: they include Syrianus, Hermias, Sarapion, Heraïscus, and Isidore.[86] Above all, it ought not to be thought that Damascius himself did not have high esteem for the 'political' virtues, he who, as the last diadoch of the private Neoplatonic school of Athens, had brought this school to a final culminating point of prosperity by his effective administration, and had taken the bold initiative of transferring it to Persia when its existence at Athens was no longer ensured. Here is his opinion:[87]

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83 Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 6,27–30 Kalbfleisch, quoted in the translation by M. Chase 2003, *Simplicius. On Aristotle* Categories *1–4*, p. 22.

84 Cf. Philoponus, *In Anal. Pr.*, p. 6,14–18 Wallies: "Having reached this point, Themistius asks the question: 'Are the *Analytics* Aristotle's creation (γέννημα), or not?', and he says they are not his creation: indeed, the divine Plato shines as a reasoner and maker of demonstrations (συλλογιστικῶς καὶ ἀποδεικτικῶς φερόμενος) in the *Phaedo* and in almost all his dialogues. Composing the work and turning the treatise in question into an art by means of a few rules is nothing extraordinary". For other examples of this kind, cf. below, p. 143 f.

85 D.J. O'Meara 2006.

86 For the last four philosophers, cf. above, pp. 8–13.

87 Damascius, *Vita Isidori* = *The Philosophical History*, fr. 124, cited in the translation by P. Athanassiadi 1999, p. 287.

> Men tend to bestow the name of virtue on a life of inactivity, but I do not agree with this view. For the virtue which engages in the midst of public life through political activity and discourse fortifies the soul and strengthens through exercise what is healthy and perfect, while the impure and false element that lurks in human lives is fully exposed and more easily set on the road to improvement. And indeed politics offers great possibilities for doing what is good and useful; also for courage and firmness. That is why the learned, who sit in their corner and philosophize at length and in a grand manner about justice and moderation, utterly disgrace themselves if they are compelled to take some action. Thus bereft of action, all discourse appears vain and empty.

On the other hand, one feature that truly distinguishes Themistius from the other post-Iamblichan Neoplatonists known to us is the fact that he was clear-sighted enough to challenge the authenticity of the famous treatise *On the All*, attributed to the Pythagorean Archytas, which was considered to be prior to Aristotle's *Categories*.[88] Indeed, according to Boethius (*In Cat.*, I, col. 162 A), Themistius thought the author was not a Pythagorean, but a Peripatetic who wished to give his new production the authority of an ancient name.

It is possible, moreover, that it would not be easy to find, among the small number known to us, another Neoplatonist who admits at the outset that in the sciences and in teaching, and hence in those of Plato and Aristotle as well, one may find much that is true and much that is false in the details (*Speech* XXI, 257d), but that in this context the false assertions are not important, since they are not deliberate lies.

> What does it matter to us, by the gods," he exclaims in the same speech (258a), "if someone is fooled when Aristotle says that what is in a place is not in something, or when Plato makes punishments extend down to the fourth generation, or some other such foolishness (ἤ τινα ὅμοιον λῆρον ἄλλον)? None of that concerns us at all[89] … as long as we do not send young children off to learn it ….

The fact of admitting that not only Aristotle, but also Plato may have uttered 'foolishness' indicates that Themistius does not follow those Neoplatonists who, like Iamblichus, conceived of Pythagorico-Platonic philosophy as a divine

88 Cf. above, p. 67 (quotation of Simplicius).

89 That is, it has no influence on our moral behavior, which is the only thing that counts.

revelation, and for whom, consequently, the texts of the *Chaldean Oracles*, the *Orphica*, some pseudo-Pythagorean texts, and Plato's dialogues, were sacred texts. It was probably also the same lucidity that made him able to detect the inauthenticity of the works attributed to the Pythagorean Archytas.[90]

It is not unlikely that Themistius was in a state of mind similar to that of the philosopher from Sicyon,[91] who, as he says in his *Speech* XXIII (*Sophistes*, 295b) was, in his opinion, the one who had appropriated philosophy in the most right and pure way among the Hellenes of his time (= the Greeks who had remained pagan); that he had been the disciple of the man from Chalcis [= Iamblichus], when the latter was already old, but that he nevertheless did not practice the new song (τὴν νέαν ᾠδήν), but the ancestral and ancient song of the Academy and the Lyceum. As far as I know, scholars are unanimous in understanding that according to Themistius, the philosopher from Sicyon, although he was a disciple of Iamblichus and a Neoplatonist, refused to follow his teacher's enthusiasm for theurgy and all that was connected with it, such as the *Chaldaean Oracles*. When, he continues, this man came to know of Themistius' works on Aristotle, he had appreciated them to the point of recommending his own students to go to Constantinople to attend the classes of Themistius. The encomiastic tone Themistius uses to speak of this philosopher from Sicyon does indeed seem to attest to a deep sympathy, based on their shared reservations with regard to the esoteric side of the philosophy of Iamblichus and his adherents. This attitude was, moreover, shared by the partisans of Theodore of Asine, the student of Porphyry and Iamblichus (who was also influenced by Amelius),[92] whose thought had a great influence in his time, at least down to the fourth century. This is attested by a letter by Julian, sent from Gaul around 359 to Priscus, who was living in Athens.[93] The future emperor begs him not to allow himself to be talked deaf by the partisans of Theodore and his students who repeat

> that Iamblichus was ambitious, he, the truly divine master, first after Pythagoras and Plato. And if it is presumptuous to display my opinion

90 Cf. Boethius, *In Cat.*, I, col. 162 A. Migne. For Pseudo-Archytas, cf. above, p. 44. and p. 67.

91 Judging by the Emperor Julian's praise of empress Eusebia (*Speech* II [III], §12, 119b–d Bidez), Sicyon, near Corinth, was in his time one of three centers of Neoplatonic philosophy, along with Athens and Mases in the Argolid.

92 Cf. W. Deuse 1973, *Theodoros von Asine, Sammlung der Testimonien und Kommentar*, pp. 1–2 and p. 20. Cf. also L. Brisson 1987, "Amélius: Sa vie, son œuvre, sa doctrine, son style", p. 818ff., and H.D. Saffrey—L.G. Westerink 1968, *Proclus, Théologie platonicienne*, vol. I, pp. XLI–XLIII.

93 *Epist.* 12, p. 19 Bidez = Testimonium 4 Deuse.

> before you with the ravings of an enthusiast, you will find in this very exaltation a reason to forgive me. For my part, I am mad about Iamblichus in philosophy, and about my namesake [= Julian the theurge] in theosophy and … in my view, next to them the others do not count.

These two texts, taken from Themistius' twenty-third *Speech* and from Julian's *Letter 12 to Priscus*, obviously do not prove that the philosopher from Sicyon and Themistius were partisans of the philosophy of Theodore of Asine, but two things clearly emerge from them: first, that in the time of Themistius there existed important schools of Neoplatonic philosophy, one of which was his own,[94] which did not adhere to the "theosophy" of the *Chaldaean Oracles* as propagated by Iamblichus; and second, that Julian himself sided with those disciples of Iamblichus who had remained faithful to theurgy.[95] The fact that Julian felt obliged to warn Priscus against the disciples of Theodore seems to indicate that these doctrinal differences had not led to open hostilities at Athens. In the words of J. Bouffartigue,[96] "It seems that some of Julian's teachers did not want to stir up quarrel between the partisans of Iamblichus and of Theodorus of Asine, and that, on the contrary, they sought avenues of reconciliation. In any case, they neither doomed the Theodoran doctrine to silence and oblivion, nor did they systematically condemn it". It was apparently a similar attitude of benevolent reserve—his heart led him toward the Iamblichan Priscus and Maximus of Ephesus—that Julian had chosen with regard to Themistius, as emerges from a remark by the philosopher himself, cited by G. Dagron,[97] in a speech in which he defends himself against criticisms, relying, among other things, on the testimony of the emperors Constantius, Julian, Valens, and Theodosius (*Speech* XXXI, 354d):

> It is enough for me that Constantius often repeated that my philosophy was the jewel of his royalty; it suffices for me that Julian *was indeed forced*

94 Themistius' eminent position at the imperial Christian court of Constantinople would, in any case, have prevented him from showing an adhesion to theurgy which, for the Christians, was equivalent to magic (cf. above p. 9 (at the bottom) f.), the practice of which was forbidden by law. On the other hand, he was always an advocate of freedom of religion in general, and of the defense of pagan temples and rituals in particular. On the political role of Themistius, cf. G. Dagron 1968, *L'Empire romain d'Orient au IVe siècle et les traditions politiques de l'hellénisme. Le témoignage de Thémistius*.

95 Cf. J. Bouffartigue 1992, *L'Empereur Julien et la culture de son temps*, for instance pp. 128–130 and 357–359.

96 J. Bouffartigue, *ibidem*, p. 358 ff.

97 G. Dagron 1968, p. 235.

> (βιασθεὶς) to declare me worthy of the embassy of the world, and not only of the Beautiful City (Constantinople), and that he acknowledged, in writing, that I held the first prize in philosophy ….

A final example that sheds light on the relations between Julian and Themistius: Ammonius' commentary on Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*[98] has preserved the memory of a debate between Themistius and Maximus of Ephesus, under the arbitrage of Julian. Against Themistius, who was defending what was, according to Ammonius, Aristotle's own opinion, viz. that syllogisms of the second and third figure are imperfect, Julian agreed with Maximus, who had adopted the views of the Peripatetic Boethos and of Porphyry, who held that these syllogisms were also perfect, an opinion also accepted later by Syrianus, Hermias, Proclus, and Ammonius himself.

3.2 *The* Paraphrases

In his *Speeches*, then, we have seen Themistius fully adhering to the unanimously harmonizing tendency of the Neoplatonic philosophy that was contemporary with him, judging by the little we know about the history of Neoplatonism. We now move on to his interpretation of Aristotle in his *Paraphrases*. In the prologue to his *Paraphrase* of the *Posterior Analytics* (1,2–12), which I will cite in the translation by R.B. Todd,[99] Themistius himself gives a very good description of the pedagogical goal he was pursuing in his *Paraphrases*:

> I thought that for me to construct explications (*exêgêseis*) of Aristotle's books in succession to so many great men was little short of futile ambition. Not much can be found that my predecessors omitted, and to attempt to construct exhaustive commentaries (*pragmateiai*) for the sake of some minor interventions would be like someone wanting to restructure the Athena of Pheidias because he thought that he could improve the tassel on her sandal. However, to extract the intentions of what is written in his books, and report it quickly in line with the conciseness of the Philosopher, as best I could, seemed both novel and quite beneficial. For I believed that revision by such a method would be convenient for those who had studied Aristotle's [works] once, but who where unable to take them up again because of the length of the [major] commentaries (*hypomnêmata*).

98 Ammonius, *In Analyt. prior.*, p. 31, 10–33 Wallies.

99 R.B. Todd 1996, *Themistius, On Aristotle on the Soul*, p. 3.

Thus, the reader of his *Paraphrase* on Aristotle's *De anima* must not expect a detailed commentary like the one by Simplicius on the same subject—the commentaries of Themistius are lost (cf. p. 74)—but an exposition, as clear and simple as possible, of Aristotle's text, without the addition of metaphysical dimensions that are not present in it. However, this method does not exclude a rather strong tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. We have already discussed, with regard to Porphyry, a long passage characteristic of this tendency that was contained in Themistius' *Paraphrase* on Aristotle's *De anima*,[100] in which, contrary to Porphyry's opinion, our philosopher had made Plato and Aristotle agree on the soul as an entelechy. Farther on,[101] Themistius has recourse to Plato's *Timaeus* to explain that the immortal λογιστικόν of the *Timaeus* is none other than the νοῦς δυνάμει χωριστός of Aristotle's *De anima*, which he too conceives as immortal. He then demonstrates that the passive intellect of the *De anima*, which is corruptible, corresponds to the mortal soul of the *Timaeus*, which is characterized by the presence of passions within it. More precisely, it corresponds to the intelligence within these passions, which Aristotle calls passive intelligence, παθητικὸς νοῦς. O. Ballériaux's article[102] entitled "Thémistius et le néoplatonisme. Le νοῦς παθητικός et l'immortalité de l'âme" gives an excellent analysis of these texts, and I refer the reader to it. The notes by R.B. Todd accompanying his translation of that part of the *Paraphrase* of the *De anima* that concerns the Intellect (pp. 93,32–116,17 Heinze) are also very illuminating, owing to their citations of many parallel texts from Plotinus and of reminiscences of Plato.[103]

Since we have spoken above (p. 70 f.) of Iamblichus' interpretation of the text *De anima* III, 4 in which, according to Iamblichus, Aristotle compares the soul of children to a tablet covered with invisible writing symbolizing the formal reasons, and since we shall pursue the history of the interpretation of this passage later on (p. 101 f.; 151 f. with n. 307; pp. 161–164), I add Themistius' version contained in the same *Paraphrase* (p. 97, 11 in the translation by R.B. Todd, p. 121):

> [...] as has been explained, the intellect is potentially all objects of thought, yet is in actuality (ἐντελεχεία) nothing until it thinks. It is, therefore, further removed from being affected since it does not even acquire a determinate nature. Instead, with the intellect you get the same result as where letters are written on a tablet that has nothing actually written

100 Cf. above, pp. 56–59, on Themistius, *In De anima*, pp. 16,19–19,37 Heinze.

101 Themistius, *In De anima*, pp. 105,13–107,29 Heinze.

102 O. Ballériaux 1994.

103 R.B. Todd 1996, *Themistius, On Aristotle On the Soul*.

> (γεγράμμενον ἐντελεχείᾳ) on it. Here you would call what is written a 'perfection' (τελείωσιν) of the tablet, not an 'affection', since it has received that for which it came into existence. For when the intellect is active ⟨towards⟩ the intelligible objects, it is not affected but perfected, so that in respect of this [activity] it is unmixed and uncompounded. In general, the potential intellect (ὁ δυνάμει νοῦς), as Aristotle says, is actually none of the things that exist (οὐδέν ἐστιν ἐνεργείᾳ τῶν ὄντων), and being none [of them] actually (μηδὲν ὢν ἐνεργείᾳ), could not be affected or mixed. For being affected and being mixed belong to what is actually something. And actual intellect (νοῦς ἐνεργείᾳ) comes into existence from the potential [intellect] when thoughts also come into existence for it, and at that point it is at once both intellect and object of thought. [The potential intellect] is not, therefore, affected by the objects of thought; but itself becomes [identical with] them. And it seems that the potential intellect comes into existence only in the human soul, since only that [soul's] affections also pay heed to reason and are naturally disposed towards it, while this is not so with the other animals.

Themistius' formulation is more precise than that of Iamblichus, which is somewhat clumsy, and in its essential features it resembles the interpretations of the later harmonizing Neoplatonists. The idea that the Aristotelian intellect in act and the potential intellect are the two aspects of the Platonic rational human soul is clearly expressed in it, and it can be said that the paraphrase as a whole already contains the main elements of future harmonizing discussions, including the doctrine of the double entelechy, which is touched upon in the text I have just cited, but clearly expressed at 18, 30–37, cited at page 59. As we shall see later on, it is this same doctrine that C. Steel and M. Perkams think is an invention of the author of the commentary on the *De anima* which the Greek manuscripts attribute to Simplicius, but which they wish to assign to Priscianus.

One can find minor doctrinal differences in it, which are due to the overall evolution of Neoplatonic doctrines, especially as compared to Iamblichus. To give only two examples: when Themistius speaks of Aristotle's passive and perishable intellect, which contains the passions (p. 107, 4–29 Heinze), he admits the mortality of this intellect, identified with the irrational soul. As I have reported elsewhere, however (I. Hadot 2004, p, 36 ff.), for Hierocles too, unlike Iamblichus and Plutarch of Athens, the irrational soul is mortal, as it was to remain from Syrianus onward. The other example concerns the Aristotelian potential intellect and the intellect in act, which, according to Simplicius, Iamblichus had situated higher on the ontological scale than he had, but

Themistius and Plutarch had already proceeded in the same way as Simplicius (cf. above, note 50, p. 70). At the same time, Themistius' interpretation is very close in its details to Plutarch's interpretation of the unwritten tablet (cf. below, p. 101). In a previous passage (*In De anima*, p. 95, 9–22 Heinze), Themistius, like Plutarch, mentions the intellect *in habitu* as a specific state of the potential intellect in children.

I add a more general remark: in his *Paraphrase* on Aristotle's *De anima*, Themistius (for instance *In De anima*, p. 107, 30–109, 3 Heinze), as Priscianus (*Metaphr. in Theophrastum*) and Simplicius (*In De anima* and *In Phys.*) were to do later, makes broad use of the exegesis of Theophrastus, the student of Aristotle. This exegesis already contains elements that open the way toward a harmonizing interpretation, such as the bringing together of the Aristotelian potential intellect and the intellect in act with the Platonic rational human soul. And Themistius concludes a series of quotations of Theophrastus with these words (108, 35 ff.), which give a good idea of his own harmonizing Neoplatonic attitude:

> But, as I have said, making claims about what philosophers believe involves special study (*skholê*) and reflection. Still, it does seem perhaps relevant to insist that someone could best understand the insight of Aristotle and Theophrastus on these [matters], **indeed perhaps also that of Plato himself**, from the passages that we have gathered.

I will content myself with these four texts from Themistius' *In De anima*, and move on immediately to his *Paraphrase* of book Lambda (= book XII) of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which is preserved in Hebrew and in a few Arabic fragments, and is accessible for those who do not read these languages in the French translation by Rémi Brague.[104] As we have seen from the example of Porphyry and Iamblichus,[105] this book of the *Metaphysics* played an important role in the process of harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Silvia Fazzo's article, entitled "L'exégèse du livre *Lambda* de la *Métaphysique* d'Aristote dans le *De principiis* et dans la *Quaestio* 1,1 d'Alexandre d'Aphrodise"[106] shows that this task was, in a sense, facilitated by the exegesis of book *Lambda* proposed by Alexander of Aphrodisias.

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104 R. Brague 1999, *Theophraste, Paraphrase de la* Métaphysique *d'Aristote* (*livre Lambda*).

105 Cf. above, pp. 60–63 (Porphyry) and p. 65 (at the bottom) f., with note 38 (Iamblichus).

106 S. Fazzo 2008.

To Aristotle's affirmation (at XII,3, 1070a25) that there is no need to admit the existence of ideas, since a particular man engenders a particular man and an individual an individual, and since the same holds true of the arts, with the medical art being the form of health, Themistius replies (ch. III, § 16–18, p. 63 ff. Brague) by the example of spontaneous generation:

> Indeed, we see a kind of wasp being born from the corpse of horses, we see bees born from the corpse of oxen, we see frogs born from filth, and we see gnats … born from wine when it spoils. Yet we do not observe that nature creates these things out of what resembles them in form, and we are certain that in the emission of sperm and the seed of each of the animals and plants (there is) a proportion that is proper to them, by which is born ⟨each of the animals and plants⟩ that is born from it, and nothing else. Thus, a horse does not come from the seed of a man, nor a man from the seed of a horse, nor one plant from the seed of another. And where are the models of these proportions in that from which these animals are engendered, unless the prepared proportions were deposited in nature already, ready to produce any possible species among the species of animals, as long as they find a matter proper to the birth from them of a determinate animal? … Inevitably, there are proportions and forms that are already deposited in nature, according to which what is made from them is made. Indeed, even if man is born only from man, it is not his father who possesses an art that (enables) him to compose what cannot be in a different or a better state than it is. And this occurs only because proportions and forms have been deposited in the nature of each of the substances, by an art (that has come) not from the father, but (has come) from these proportions … There is nothing surprising about the fact that nature does not understand how what it does leads to the goal that is intended. Indeed, it does not know and does not reflect in doing what it does. This shows you that these proportions are inspired to it by an inspiration coming from a cause that is more noble than it, more worthy and of a higher rank. It is the soul that is on earth, which Plato believed is born from the second gods, and Aristotle believed that it is born from the sun and the ecliptic.

Above all, one should not believe that for Themistius, the pre-existence of ideas-forms stops at the level of "the soul that is on earth".[107] Themistius does

107 As is indicated by R. Brague 1999, this is an expression of Plotinus, for instance at *Enn.* IV,4 [28], § 22 and at § 26, lines 29–31 (where the soul in question is the soul *of* the earth).

not explain what entity he means by this turn of phrase, and the simultaneous references to Plato and to Aristotle, which mutually neutralize each other, show that he has no intention, for the moment, of clarifying this question. In the *Paraphrase on the De anima*, however, he mentions the World Soul in the same context.[108] Later on, in chapter VII, §§ 25–26, Themistius clearly implies that the idea-forms are already present in Aristotle's Prime Mover, the divine Intellect, and that for this reason this Intellect also knows the things lower than it. Note that this interpretation goes against the obvious opinion of Aristotle in his *Metaphysics* (book Λ, 9,1074b33), for whom the Intellect can think only itself, and can know nothing of the things lower than itself without contravening its own perfection. Here are the texts by Themistius:

> For the divine intellect, the first, it is not so [*scil*. as for our intellect], but it intelligizes the intelligized things that exist in it, by which it is informed, and, in general, which are in it.[109]

> It intelligizes all the existent (things), (but) not as if they were outside its nature or were actions foreign to it. But it is what makes them be born ⟨and creates them⟩, and it is what they are.[110]

> It is henceforth evident from all this that God is the first principle (and that) he knows at the same time his essence and all the things of which

108 Themistius, *In De an*., I, p. 26,25 ff. Heinze, cited after the translation by R. Brague 1999. p. 135: "That it is likely that the soul of the Whole pours forth by illumination (ἐλλάμπειν) on bodies either the soul, or an animation (ἐμψυχία) that is a certain vital power, spread throughout all things, would seem to be made clear by those animals that are born spontaneously and which, as soon as a determinate mixture of the body (is realized), immediately begin to breathe, to live, and to move spontaneously, as mice are said to do in Egypt and, among us, maggots, mosquitoes, and many animal species of this kind".

109 Themistius, *In Metaph*. Λ, chap. VII, § 26, p. 93 Brague 1999.

110 Themistius, *In Metaph*. Λ, chap. VII, § 29, p. 94 Brague 1999. Cf. Themistius, *In De anima*, p. 99,24–25 Heinze: "The god is indeed in a sense (identical to) the very things that exist, and in another sense he is their leader". Cf. also the last four citations with the interpretation given by S. Pines 1987, "Some distinctive metaphysical conceptions in Themistius' commentary on book Λ and their place in the history of philosophy", pp. 186–189. S. Pines, who does not seem to know the works of E.P. Mahoney 1973 and 1982 and by O. Ballériaux 1989 and 1994, observes (p. 189) "Themistius was, as we have seen, strongly influenced by Neoplatonic and, in a lesser measure, probably also by Stoic views". Yet we know that from the outset, Neoplatonism had also integrated many Stoic elements into its system. Above (p. 63 with note 29), for instance, we mentioned the integration of Stoic *apathia* into the Neoplatonic system of virtues. Cf. above, note 70, p. 76.

> he is the principle, and that, since he rules over his essence, he also rules over all the things that subsist in him.[111]

Identifying the ideas with the thoughts of the god-demiurge of Plato's *Timaeus* was already rather frequent in the period of Middle Platonism, and this viewpoint always remained valid in a good many Neoplatonists, although it nevertheless underwent some developments over time.[112] To have applied this interpretation to Aristotle's intellect and prime mover, and to have attributed to it the knowledge of all the things that have emerged from it ("it is what makes them born …"), thus, to have turned it into a final cause *and* a *causa efficiens*,[113] is one more example proving Themistius' tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and is equivalent to an identification of Aristotle's prime mover with the Platonic demiurge. Although these texts by Themistius represent what are, as far as I know, the first testimonies to this interpretation of the Aristotelian Intellect, this does not mean that Themistius invented it. It is more than probable that it goes back at least to Iamblichus, and that the Aristotelian texts on which it was based were the same as those used later, with the same purpose, by Ammonius son of Hermias and by Simplicius, particularly *Phys*. II,3,194b29–31 and VIII,10.

Let us return, however, to Themistius' *Paraphrase* of book Λ of the *Metaphysics*. I will not insist on Themistius' discussions of the relations between the good and the intellect at the beginning of chapter X, where he seems to want to say that "the good is not at a higher degree than the intellect," which may [but not necessarily] amount to a criticism of Plotinus' system, as R. Brague

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111 Themistius, *In Metaph*. Λ, chap. IX, § 15, p. 113 Brague 1999.

112 What changes over time is the place occupied by the Intellect-Demiurge of the *Timaeus* in the ontological hierarchy: from the first rank it enjoys among the Middle-Platonists, it descends, through the multiplication and subdivision of hypostases from the One, or even the Ineffable, among the Neoplatonists, lower and lower in the hierarchical scale of the Intellects, often without its exact position being specified in the texts. Cf. I. Hadot 2004, *Studies on the Neoplatonist Hierocles*, chapters III,11 and 12, "Hierocles' Demiurge Cannot be the Supreme Principle" and "The Ontological Position of the Demiurge in Hierocles' Philosophical System", pp. 61–82. In parallel, the paradigmatic ideas, although remaining in some way immanent to the demiurgic Intellect, can acquire an existence independent from and higher than that Intellect.

113 Unlike Themistius, Syrianus (*In Metaph*. B, p. 10,32–11,5 Kroll; cf. *In Metaphys*. N, p. 175,21–23 Kroll) thinks that Aristotle, abandoning the ancestral philosophy, does not concede that the immaterial and separate kinds are efficient causes, but only final causes: cf. above, n. 85, p. 28.

remarks, given that Brague is not sure of his translation.[114] Toward the end of the research on the first principle, Themistius writes:

> And in my opinion, one can only speak about that as we have spoken about it: the first, moving nature is pure, purified, without parts, and is not mixed with matter. The genuine one is not divided: it moves all things according to structure and order, and by a motion that is not interrupted nor exhausted for all eternity. (All things) aim at this one, and their structure comes from it. Its unity makes the world one, and makes each of the animals that are in it one. And in addition to its unity (the one) also makes it existent. Indeed, for each thing, its completion is found in nothing other than [in the fact] that it is said to be one.[115]

Like many texts from the Paraphrasis on book Λ, this passage, obviously based on Aristotle, *Physics* VIII, 10, can be read in two different ways: either with the Aristotelian meaning, or in the Neoplatonic way. In the first case it is about the divine Intellect, in the second case it is about the One. This ambiguity is deliberate, I think—he might have been more explicit in his lost commentary (cf. above, p. 74). Yet one could wonder why Themistius uses here the attribute 'genuine', if it is not about the One.

The *Paraphrase* ends with a reminiscence of the end of Aristotle's book Λ, which is a quotation of a verse from Homer:

> Yet beings do not wish to be badly governed. 'The government of many is not good, let one alone be sovereign!'[116]

Indeed, Themistius writes:

> Among existent things, there is none whose government must go toward error; nor is there anything good in the multiplicity of principles.[117]

We recall that Porphyry had derived the conclusion from book Λ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* that the system of οὐσίαι developed in that work presupposed the

114 Cf. Themistius, *In Metaph.* Λ, chap. X, § 1, p. 117 Brague 1999 (with note 4), and Brague's commentary at p. 149.

115 Themistius, *In Metaphys.* Λ, chap. X, § 22, p. 125 Brague 1999.

116 Aristotle, *Metaphys.* X, 1076a = Homer, *Iliad*, II, 204.

117 Themistius, *In Metaph.* Λ, chap. X, § 23 end, p. 125 ff. Brague 1999.

Plotinian One,[118] which was situated above the hypostasis of Intellect. This, as we shall see,[119] was to remain the opinion of the last Neoplatonists. Syrianus too, making a synthesis between the end of book Λ and the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, deduced from these two texts that Aristotle had conceived as first principle the One *qua* final cause.[120] As for Themistius, the texts from his *Metaphrasis* of book Λ shed no light on the ontological levels between the One and the Intellect. Nothing in his paraphrase of book Λ obliged Themistius to go beyond the ontological level dealt with in that book, especially when one thinks of the goal he had set for himself in elaborating his paraphrases.[121] In the same way, and for the same pedagogical reason, neither Simplicius' commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus, nor Hierocles' commentary on the *Carmen aureum*, both of which are addressed to beginners, ever mention their highest principle, the Ineffable or the One. They speak almost exclusively of the Demiurge, although the philosophical systems they develop in these two works presupposes the One or the Ineffable as a first principle, as is generally admitted today.[122] Above all, however, one must take into account Proclus' procedure in his *De aeternitate mundi* (which K. Verrycken rightly says survives in the *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* by Philoponus). I quote Verrycken:[123] "Nowhere in that work does Proclus speak about the place of the Demiurge in the world of intelligible reality, because it is sufficient in an argument about the eternity of the sensible world simply to accept a transcendent creative principle. And no one would call Proclus' theology theistic because of his not offering in his *de Aeternitate Mundi* a derivation of the demiurgic principle from higher intelligible reality".[124] Based on the Arabic and Hebrew texts known to me only in translation, which, as we have seen, are characterized by the presence of many Neoplatonic elements, it is, of course, not possible to prove,

118 Cf. above, pp. 60–63.

119 Cf. below, pp. 129–136.

120 Cf. above, note 85, p. 28.

121 Cf. the quotation (Photius) above, p. 74.

122 Cf. above, p. 94 with note 112, and below, p. 99 with note 130.

123 K. Verrycken 1990, "The metaphysics of Ammonius son of Hermeias", p. 212.

124 Cf. David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 120,19ff.: To the question "Why does Aristotle say in his *Metaphysics* that the first principle is the Intellect rather than the Good, as Plato does?", David (Elias) first answers that if Aristotle did not talk about the Good as first principle in his *Metaphysics*, it was because by writing the *Metaphysics* he did theology immediately after the *Physics*, and that in this context the Intellect was a principle closer to nature than the Good would have been. Second, he replies that the prologue to the *Nicomachean Ethics* provides proof that Aristotle had also known the Good as first principle, since there he says that all things desire the Good.

in the true sense of the term, whether or not Themistius accepted an entity like the One above the Intellect in his metaphysical system, although I consider it certain, in view of the number of Plotinian echoes and textual parallels, among other reasons. It is, however, impossible to doubt his fervent adherence to the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato.

4 Plutarch of Athens (Died 431/32) and His Student Hierocles of Alexandria (End of the 4th and 1st Half of the 5th Century)

The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus became established in Athens in the mid-fourth century with Priscus, disciple of Aidesius, who had in turn been a disciple of Iamblichus, and Iamblichus II, a grandson of Sopatros, the successor of Iamblichus at the head of his school in Syria.[125] The following two texts testify to the fact that both Plutarch and his disciple Hierocles not only conformed to Iamblichus' syncretism concerning the *Chaldean Oracles*, Orphism, poets such as Homer, etc., but also to his harmonization of the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato. These texts are the summaries that Photius provides of the goal of Hierocles' treatise *On Providence*,[126] as well as of the contents of the whole treatise:

> The stated goal of the present investigation is to deal with providence by putting together the doctrine of Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, the author wishes to bring the two thinkers together (συνάπτειν), not only in their theories on providence, but also on all the points in which they conceive the soul as immortal, and in which they have philosophized on the heavens and the world. With regard to all those who have placed these authors in disagreement, he explains at length that they are gravely mistaken, and that they have departed both from the intention of the two thinkers and from the truth, some voluntarily, because they offered themselves up as victims to their quarrelsome spirit and their foolishness, the others because they were the slaves of a preconceived opinion and of their ignorance. He adds that the preceding authors formed an imposing chorus until the moment when the wisdom of Ammonius[127] shone forth, who, he recalls emphatically, was nicknamed 'student of the gods'. It was he, he

125 Cf. D.J. O'Meara 1989, *Pythagoras Revived*, pp. 110–118 and D.P. Taormina 1989, *Plutarco di Atene. L'Uno, l'Anima, Le Forme*, pp. 15–25 and 54–55.

126 Photius, *Library*, cod. 214, p. 171 b 33 f. Bekker, cited after the translation, slightly modified, by R. Henry, *Photius*, vol. III, Paris 1962, p. 125 f.

127 The Ammonius mentioned here, as in the continuation of the text and in the parallel

> says, who brought back to their purity the doctrines of these two ancient philosophers, removed the foolishness that had developed on both sides and showed the agreement (ὁμοδοξία [cf. p. 41 ff.) between the thought of Plato and of Aristotle on the important and most necessary questions of doctrine.

A bit farther on,[128] Photius gives an overview of the entire treatise:

> His work is divided into seven books. The first one consists in an exposition of the exercises and research he has carried out on providence, justice, and the judgment that will fall upon us according to the merit of our actions; the second, grouping together the Platonic opinions, provides their confirmation on the basis of Plato's writings themselves; the third presents the objections one could raise to contest these opinions and tries to refute their intention; the fourth wishes to place in agreement with the doctrine of Plato what are called the Oracles and the hieratic institutions; the fifth attributes to Orpheus and to Homer and to all those who were famous before the appearance of Plato, the philosophical theory of Plato on the above subjects; the sixth takes all the philosophers later than Plato, with Aristotle himself as the most eminent, as far as Ammonius of Alexandria, whose most remarkable disciples were Plotinus and Origen. He therefore takes, after Plato, and as far as the authors that have just been cited, all those who have made a name for themselves in philosophy, and he proves that they all agree with the doctrine of Plato; all those who have tried to break the unity of views between Plato and Aristotle, he ranges among the mediocres who must be loathed: they have altered many facts of Plato's work while proclaiming him to be their master, and the same holds true for the writings of Aristotle on the part of those who lay claim to his school. And all their machinations have had no other goal than to find a way to place the Stagirite and the son of Aristo in conflict. The seventh book takes a new starting point by dealing with the doctrine professed by Ammonius; Plotinus and Origen, as well as Porphyry and Iamblichus, and their successors, according to his comments, were born of divine stock, down to Plutarch the Athenian, whom he says was the teacher who taught him such doctrines; all of them are in agreement with the philosophy of Plato in its state of purity.

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text cod. 251, vol. VII Henry, p. 191, 36–37, is Ammonius Saccas, not Ammonius Hermeiou, as H. Hunger 1978, *Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, p. 27 with n. 89, implied.

128 Photius, *Library*, cod 214, p. 173a5 ff. Bekker, vol. III, p. 128 ff. Henry.

For an ample commentary on this passage, and more generally on Hierocles as the heir, by way of Plutarch of Athens, to the philosophy of Iamblichus, albeit with some minor differences, I refer the reader once again to the book by D.J. O'Meara, *Pythagoras Revived*,[129] to my own works, and to the book by H. Schibli.[130] We have spoken above of the role that theurgy played for Hierocles and his student Theosebius.[131] What matters to us at present is the strength of conviction with which Hierocles claims his adherence, and that of all the Neoplatonists from Ammonius Saccas to Plutarch, to the tendency proclaiming the harmony of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Yet Photius' summaries, except perhaps for the first sentence quoted, do not manifest the limits that the traditional faith of the Middle and Neoplatonists in the superiority of Plato (and the Pythagoreans, from Iamblichus on) over Aristotle usually placed upon the belief that Aristotle's philosophy was an indispensable complement to the philosophy of Plato (and of Pythagoras).

We do not have any trace of teaching on Hierocles' part concerning the works of Aristotle after his return to Alexandria, and the meager summaries and extracts Photius provides of his seven-book work *On Providence* do not acquaint us with the way in which he "put together the doctrine of Plato and of Aristotle" on this subject. Since Aristotle himself had not developed a doctrine concerning providence, the *Treatise on Providence* of Alexander of Aphrodisias, in which the author reports the answer "which he considers properly Aristotelian to a problem the Stagirite had not dealt with, but about which thought and life demand a solution",[132] may have represented an aid for the

129 D.J. O'Meara 1989, pp. 110–118. However, when he says (p. 118 top of the page): "All that is missing for this Iamblichan view of philosophy to be complete is Orpheus …", Mr. O'Meara has failed to remember what Photius reports about the content of the fifth book of Hierocles' *De providentia* in the text I have just cited, where Orpheus was named alongside Homer "and all those who were famous before the appearance of Plato", that is, certainly Pythagoras and the Hermetic books, among others.

130 Cf. I. Hadot 2004, *Studies on the Neoplatonist Hierocles*; *eadem* 1978, *Le problème du néoplatonisme alexandrin: Hiéroclès et Simplicius*, pp. 67–143 and, *last but not least*, H.S. Schibli 2002, *Hierocles of Alexandria*. Among other things, these books refute the old theory of K. Praechter, long held to be valid, according to which the philosophies expressed in the work of Hierocles and in Simplicius' commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus correspond to a pre-Plotinian stage.

131 Cf. above, pp. 1 (at the bottom)–5.

132 P. Thillet 2003, *Alexandre d'Aphrodise, Traité de la providence, Version arabe de Abū Bišr Mattä ibn Yūnus*, p. 41. In his survey of the posterity of Alexander's *De providentia*, P. Thillet notes (p. 63) that when Hierocles rejects Alexander's identification of fatality with "the nature of bodies according to Plato", he does not refer to Alexander's Περὶ προνοίας, but to his Περὶ εἱμαρμένης. "It was in this work", writes Thillet, "that one can read the identification

Neoplatonists in forging their own 'Aristotelian doctrine' on this subject, and in placing it in agreement with that of Plato, which was still quite rudimentary in his lifetime. But since, according to Photius, Hierocles did not wish to bring the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle together on providence alone, "but also on all the points in which they conceive the soul as immortal and where they have philosophized on the heavens and the world", we are authorized to conclude that this agreement was valid, in Hierocles' view, for all the doctrines he expounds, and therefore also for those he sets forth in detail on the demiurge and his way of creating the world without pre-existing matter, for all eternity and by his being alone:[133] doctrines that make his demiurge-intellect a *causa efficiens* at the same time as a *causa finalis*. What is more, Hierocles' text on the theology of numbers, in which he identifies the demiurge with the number four, assimilated to the Pythagorean tetractys, indicates very clearly that for him the demiurge was not the supreme principle of his theology.[134]

As far as Hierocles' teacher is concerned, we know from Marinus[135] that Proclus, upon his arrival at Athens, had still studied Aristotle's treatise *On the soul* and Plato's *Phaedo* under the guidance of Plutarch, who was quite old. This implies that Plutarch had as favorable a judgment as did Iamblichus on Aristotle's treatise *De anima*, on which, moreover, Plutarch had commented. From the research by D.P. Taormina concerning the influence of Aristotle on Plutarch's doctrine of the soul,[136] I will content myself here with citing the criticism of this doctrine by Ammonius son of Hermias, a criticism that is reported by Stephanus of Alexandria. It shows Plutarch's close adherence to the theses of Iamblichus (reported above, p. 70 ff.),[137] as well as Ammonius' opposition to

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of fate with nature. That this is the 'Platonic nature of bodies' is a mere interpretation of the Neoplatonist philosopher Hierocles".

133 Cf. I. Hadot 2004, *Studies on the Neoplatonist Hierocles*, pp. 15–36.

134 Hierocles, *In Carmen aureum*, pp. 87,16–89,18 Köhler. This text has been given an ample commentary in I. Hadot 1990, "Le démiurge comme principe dérivé dans le système ontologique d'Hiéroclès", and *eadem* 1993, "À propos de la place ontologique du démiurge dans le système philosophique d'Hiéroclès le néoplatonicien". An extensive summary of these two articles may be found in I. Hadot 2004, *Studies on the Neoplatonist Hierocles*, pp. 63–82.

135 Marinus, *Proclus ou Sur le Bonheur*, § 12, p. 14 ff. Saffrey-Segonds.

136 Cf. D.P. Taormina 1989, *Plutarco di Atene*, pp. 72–93.

137 Stephanus of Alexandria (?) = Philoponus, *In De anima*, III, pp. 518,20–120,12 Hayduck, cited after the translation by D.P. Taormina 1993, "Dynamique de l'écriture …", p. 226 ff. I translate a few supplementary lines, which are in italics. For Iamblichus, cf. the passage from Stephanus of Alexandria (?) cited above, p. 70. As regards Plutarch, the intellect *in habitu* is an aspect of the potential intellect.

this extreme degree of the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, which he finds in Plutarch:

> For [Plutarch] says that the first meaning of the intellect [= intellect in the soul] is intellect *in habitu* (καθ' ἕξιν) such, for instance, as that of children. For Plutarch will have it that according to Aristotle, children possess the reasons of things (λόγους τῶν πραγμάτων), that the rational soul knows all things, and that learning is not learning properly so called, but reminiscence. For this reason, he teaches that the intellect in children is *in habitu* and that they possess the reasons of things, but are unaware of things, because they lack learning, which learning is reminiscence. *The second meaning of 'intellect' is the intellect that is at the same time in habitu and in act, as is the case with the intellect of adults* [...] *Indeed, it has already undergone a process of learning and knows things, and in a certain way it has remembered them through learning. The third meaning is that of the intellect that is in act alone, which is the intellect from without* [...] Ammonius criticizes them both, both Alexander [sc. of Aphrodisias] and Plutarch, saying that both commit errors, some of which are their own, and others common [...] *The common error is that both say that the third meaning of the intellect is the outside intellect in act, which is, briefly put, the god: for Aristotle does not speak of the intellect from outside at this time, when he is not undertaking to carry out a theological study, and where, moreover, the subject of discussion is the intellect that is a part of the soul. For he says at the beginning: 'on the part of the soul by which it thinks and knows'* [...] The error proper to Plutarch is to attribute doctrines of Plato to Aristotle. For it is Plato, not Aristotle, who thinks that the intellect of children is *in habitu* and possesses the reasons of things. Yet Plutarch thinks that Aristotle says the same things as Plato. And how could he not be speaking falsely if Aristotle contradicts him? In fact, Aristotle says that the intellect of children resembles an unwritten tablet, and that for this reason it is capable of receiving (ἐπιτήδειός ἐστι πρὸς τὸ δέξασθαι) the reasons of things (λόγους τῶν πραγμάτων), which it does not possess and which it has received. Alexander and Plutarch are thus in error, together and each on his own.

D.P. Taormina comments as follows on the two testimonies from Stephanus of Alexandria concerning Iamblichus and Plutarch:[138] "According to Iamblichus and Plutarch, the universals thus have their origin within the soul itself. In this

138 D.P. Taormina 1993, "Dynamique de l'écriture ...", p. 227.

sense, the expression λόγοι τῶν πραγμάτων is fundamental, and must be interpreted in the light of the soul's status as a reality 'intermediary' between the sensible and the intelligible, the divisibles and the indivisibles, the generated and the unengendered, the perishable and the imperishable, the intelligent and the irrational. In this perspective, as C. Steel has shown, the soul is at the same time model and image. As an image of the intellect, it contains in its essence the λόγοι that are images of the eternal ideas. In their turn, these λόγοι are λόγοι τῶν πραγμάτων, that is, models of sensible things. The λόγος thus has a twofold value, cognitive and cosmological. On the one hand, the λόγοι consubstantial to the soul are the images of the intelligibles, and it is by their means that the soul accedes indirectly to the intelligibles. On the other hand, they correspond to active principles that cause the images of the models, in other words, of the forms, to appear in the sensible world. The totality of λόγοι thus guarantees both the possibility of reasoning and the possibility of the organization of the sensible world".

Let us add simply that this doctrine is also present in Porphyry, who says in his *Sentences* (no. 16) that

> *The soul possesses the reason-principles* (τοὺς λόγους) *of all things*, but it acts in accordance with them either by being called by something else to take them in hand, or by turning itself inwards toward them: if it is called by something else, as if toward external objects, it produces sensations, but if it has penetrated within itself toward the intellect, it is in intellections.[139]

This text should be compared with the following:

> Porphyry affirms—says Nemesius (*De nat. hom.*, 7, p. 182,4 Matthaei)—in his treatise *On Sensation* that neither a cone nor an image nor anything else is the cause of the act of seeing, but that it is the soul itself which, when it encounters visible objects, recognizes that it is itself these visible objects, *because the soul contains all beings within itself*.

D.P. Taormina (p. 225) rightly emphasizes the 'subtle but solid' link that unites not only Iamblichus and Plutarch of Athens, but also these two philosophers and Priscianus of Lydia, who lived a century later, and whom we shall discuss later (p. 159 ff.). She might also have added Simplicius, Priscian's fellow-student

139 Translation based on Brisson et alii 2005, *Porphyre, Sentences*, p. 309.

under Damascius, whose declared intention to follow Iamblichus step by step we have already had occasion to mention several times. This intention also manifests itself in the generous dimensions assumed in Simplicius' work, as in that of the three aforementioned philosophers, by the harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, whereas, as we shall see, Syrianus and Proclus set much more rigorous limits to this harmonization. Let us also note that with regard to a detail of the doctrine on the soul, Ammonius diverges from the way of harmonizing the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle practiced by Iamblichus and Plutarch. We thus already begin to glimpse, first, that as far as the practice of harmonization is concerned, it would be a mistake to oppose as a block the teaching of the school of Athens from Plutarch to Damascius, which was in fact by no means homogenous, to that of Ammonius and his students at Alexandria. Second, that the attitude of Plutarch and Hierocles, characterized by a strong faithfulness to Iamblichus, was not maintained with the same fervor by Syrianus and Proclus, but was reinvigorated under Damascius by Priscianus and Simplicius.

5 Syrianus (1st Half of the 5th Century)

On the harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, the tendencies of this philosopher, although clearly less accentuated, nevertheless take their place within the broad outlines of the already lengthy tradition we have tried to describe. We know from Marinus[140] that Syrianus, born at Alexandria, who, like Hierocles, had become the disciple of Plutarch at Athens, was designated by the latter as his successor at the head of the school. It was under the guidance of Syrianus that Proclus studied, for barely two years,[141] the Aristotelian treatises on logic, ethics, politics, and physics, "as well as theological science, which surpasses them all", that is, the treatise that we call the *Metaphysics*. And after having thus been well prepared "as if by preliminary sacrifices or lesser mysteries", Proclus had been gradually led, in a well ordered way, "not skipping any step", to the "mystagogy" of Plato. Marinus' insistence on the progressive ordering of Proclus' Aristotelian studies under Syrianus demonstrates the existence of a reading plan of Aristotle's treatises, established according to pedagogical criteria. In the succession of its subject-matters, this plan must

140 Marinus, *Proclus ou Sur le Bonheur*, § 13, p. 15 ff. Saffrey-Segonds.

141 This lapse of time may seem to us surprisingly short, but Proclus had already studied Aristotelian philosophy at Alexandria, under a certain Olympiodorus (Marinus, *Proclus ou Sur le Bonheur*, § 9, p. 11 Saffrey-Segonds).

have been similar to the one we find later in the prefaces to the commentaries on the *Categories* of Ammonius and his school. Marinus' text also proves that the Aristotelian cursus was still considered as an indispensable preparation for Platonic studies.

In addition to commentaries on the dialogues of Plato, all of which are lost, and to his great treatise in ten books, also lost, on *The harmony* (of the teachings) *of Orpheus, Pythagoras and Plato with the Chaldaean Oracles*, a treatise which, if we can judge by its title, was entirely within the syncretistic Iamblichean tradition to which Plutarch and Hierocles also belonged before him, Syrianus had written commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories*, the *De interpretatione*, the *Prior Analytics*, the *Physics*, the *De caelo* and the *De anima*.[142] Of all his Aristotelian commentaries, only those on books BΓMN of the *Metaphysics* have been preserved. After studying and commenting on the fragments of the works by Syrianus concerned with the *Organon*, R.L. Cardullo arrives at the following conclusions:[143] "Indeed, Syrianus, in his entire exegesis of the *Organon*, demonstrates a lively, concrete interest in Aristotelian doctrines. He reads and comments on Aristotle's texts with a great deal of attention, and always gives them an in-depth, acute interpretation. His exegesis is certainly less philaristotelian than was that of Porphyry, but is nevertheless not at all hostile, as was that of the Middle Platonists, who were averse to Aristotle. Indeed, when Syrianus is convinced of the validity of the Aristotelian argumentation he is commenting, he accepts it, and often clarifies its meaning by recourse, if necessary, to other contexts in which the Stagirite has given a better explanation or exposition of the same theory. Often, indeed, the Neoplatonist finds himself in agreement with Aristotle's logical theories, and limits himself to giving a literal exegesis of them. However, when he identifies errors in reasoning or incompatibility with Platonism in what he reads, then he polemicizes with Aristotle in no uncertain terms, and in a punctual, pointblank way, or corrects him on the basis of the Platonic conception, which is more exact and more 'true' … Syrianus never intends to force the Aristotelian text in a 'Platonic' direction; he does not believe that Aristotle had intended to limit his discourse to the domain of concepts and words alone in his logical writings, and therefore he also evaluates its import on the ontological level as well. However, his reading of these works of the *Organon*, filtered as it is through the lens of Platonic-Neoplatonic metaphysics, far from revealing the true meaning of Aristotelian logic, indeed

142 Cf. R.L. Cardullo 1995, *Siriano esegeta di Aristotele, I, Frammenti e testimonianze dei commentari all'*Organon, p. 35 ff.

143 R.L. Cardullo 1995, *Siriano esegeta di Aristotele*, p. 64 ff.

distorts its meaning as well, going far beyond the restricted confines within which Aristotle had probably circumscribed it". I agree with R.L. Cardullo, and I would add that in his commentary on book B of the *Metaphysics*, Syrianus went remarkably far in the harmonization of the Neoplatonic doctrines with those of Aristotle, by attributing to Aristotle an acceptance of the Neoplatonic One as *causa finalis*, if not as *causa efficiens*.[144] For my part, I would merely be more hesitant concerning the possibilities of defining the degree of 'phil-aristotelianism' of Porphyry, who, in any case, did not always try to reconcile the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato "whatever the cost".[145] We have seen above (pp. 54–60), with regard to fr. 249 Smith, among others, that his attitude toward Aristotle was not lacking in violent criticism, and the almost complete loss of all the Porphyrian commentaries on Aristotle brings it about that we are simply no longer in a position to know it in detail. For instance, of all his commentaries on Aristotle's *Organon*, we possess only his minor commentary by questions and answers, since his major commentary on the same treatise, dedicated to Gedalius, is unfortunately lost to us. We can have some idea of the complexity of the subjects dealt with in the major commentary only through the commentary of Simplicius,[146] who, for his part, bases himself on Iamblichus' commentary, but in most cases we are unable to say with certainty what is due to Porphyry, to Iamblichus, or to the agreement of both. Porphyry did not think, moreover, that ontological questions were completely excluded from the *Categories*, as is already proved by his minor commentary by questions and answers,[147] and is confirmed by his major commentary.[148] In any case, Iamblichus had occasionally dealt with them in his commentary on the

144 See above, note 85, p. 28.

145 As is the view of R.L. Cardullo 1995, p. 59: "In fact, Syrianus, unlike Porphyry and Iamblichus, does not intend to reconcile Plato and Aristotle 'whatever the cost' ".

146 Cf. above, p. 67 f., the quotation from Simplicius.

147 Porphyre, *In Cat. per interrogationem et responsionem*, 58,23 ff., cited after the translation of R. Bodéüs 2008, *Porphyre, Commentaire aux Catégories d'Aristote*, p. 95: "Since words (φωναί), like a messenger, announce things (πράγματα), they derive the differences that characterize them from the things they announce. Now, the things that make their use necessary are necessarily considered, because it is according to the generic differences they announce that the words, too, receive the distinctive feature that expresses their genus. Incidentally, of course, research happens to deal with the generic differences of beings, but it deals primarily with words that are significant, as has been said". As R. Bodéüs remarks (p. 95, note 1), "Here, Porphyry concedes that linguistic differences, since they are semantic in nature, necessarily reflect ontological differences".

148 Cf. the testimony of Dexippus, reported above, pp.60–63.

Categories.[149] Like Themistius and Syrianus, Porphyry used other Aristotelian treatises in his explanation of a specific treatise of Aristotle:[150] this was a generalized habit among the Neoplatonists. Since we have a very limited number of commentaries originating from the various Neoplatonists known to us, and as a result it is not possible for us to compare entire commentaries on the same Aristotelian treatise written by each of our Neoplatonists, we can only evaluate very approximately the precise degree of their respective 'philaristotelianism', bearing in mind that it was variable.

We are fortunate that Syrianus himself gave clear expression to his general attitude toward Aristotle in the prologue to his commentary to book M (13) of the *Metaphysics*:[151]

> I am not a natural controversialist, nor yet would I count myself as a disciple of Aristotle on merely a few or trivial topics; rather, I am one of those who admire both his logical methodology overall and who would accept with enthusiasm his treatments of ethical and physical questions. And that I may not make a bore of myself by enumerating in detail all the excellent aspects of this man's philosophy, let me just ask why every intelligent person might not justly marvel at the apt remarks, accompanied by demonstrations of the highest quality, to be found in this most excellent treatise on the subject of both the forms in matter and definitions, and of the divine and unmoved separable causal principles of the whole cosmos—although indeed they are beyond the reach of all synthetic treatment or too detailed exposition—and declare the author [ἡγεμόνα[152]] of such a philosophical enquiry a benefactor of the life of man [εὐεργέτην τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίου[153]]. For all this he is owed the warmest thanks both from us and from all those who can appreciate his acuity of mind.

149 Cf. the quotation from Simplicius, above, p. 67.

150 Cf. above, p. 61: in his lost major commentary on the *Categories*, Porphyry made incidental use of book Λ of the *Metaphysics*.

151 Cited in the translation by Dillon-O'Meara 2006, *Syrianus, On Aristotle Metaphysics 13–14*, p. 31ff.

152 The translation 'author' is not felicitous, for it conceals the highly appreciative nuance contained in ἡγεμών; I adopt the translation 'leader' in the sense of 'guide' by Michael Frede 2009, "Syrianus on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*", p. 35.

153 It is interesting to compare this praise of Aristotle with Hermias' praise of Socrates at the beginning of his commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*: Ὁ Σωκράτης ἐπὶ εὐεργεσίᾳ τοῦ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένους καὶ τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν νέων κατεπέμφθη εἰς γένεσιν.

> However, since it is the fact that, for whatever reasons, both in other parts of his theological treatise and especially in the last two books, 13 and 14, he has indulged in a good deal of criticism of the first principles of the Pythagoreans and the Platonists, while never presenting any adequate justification for his position, and in many instances, if one may state the truth quite frankly, not even meeting them on their own ground, but rather basing his objections on hypotheses propounded by himself, it seemed reasonable, in fairness to the more unsophisticated students, lest, under the influence of the well-deserved reputation of the man, they be seduced into contempt for divine realities (*pragmata*) and the inspired philosophy of the ancients, to subject his remarks, to the best of our ability, to a judicious and impartial examination, and to demonstrate that the doctrines of Pythagoras and Plato about the first principles remain free of disproof or refutation, while the arguments of Aristotle against them for the most part miss the mark and pursue lines of enquiry quite irrelevant to those divine men, while on the few occasions when they seek to make a direct attack on them, they are unable to bring to bear any refutation, large or small. And necessarily so; for 'the truth is never refuted', in the words of that divine man,[154] and in assimilating their arguments about first principles to the realities, the fathers of those arguments established them 'as firmly and unshakably as it is proper for arguments to be'.

The first paragraph of this text has been interpreted in very different ways by H.D. Saffrey,[155] D.J. O'Meara,[156] R.L. Cardullo,[157] and M. Frede,[158] on the one hand, all four of whom take very seriously—as I do, moreover—Syrianus' declaration of his high esteem for Aristotle, and on the other hand, by Chr. Helmig,[159] who minimizes it. H.D. Saffrey emphasizes Syrianus' genuine admiration for Aristotle in all his works on logic, ethics, the philosophy of nature, and—as we should add, using Syrianus' very words—everything that, in the very treatise of the *Metaphysics*, is said "of both the forms in matter and definitions, and of the

154 Socrates in Plato, *Gorg*. 473 B.

155 H.D. Saffrey 1987, "Comment Syrianus, le maître de l'école néoplatonicienne d'Athènes, considérait-il Aristote?".

156 In *Pythagoras revived* …, p. 121.

157 R.L. Cardullo 1993, "Syrianus défenseur de Platon contre Aristote", p. 199 ff., and *eadem* 1995, *Siriano esegeta di Aristotele*, p. 57 ff.

158 M. Frede 2009, "Syrianus on Aristotle's Metaphysics", p. 32 ff.

159 Chr. Helmig 2009, "'The truth can never be refuted'—Syrianus' view(s) on Aristotle reconsidered", p. 31 with note 78.

divine and unmoved separable causal principles of the whole cosmos". Saffrey also points out, by means of comparative examples, the extraordinary sign of esteem contained in the title 'benefactor of humanity' which Syrianus gives to Aristotle, to which examples I would also add Hermias' similar mention with regard to Socrates (above, note 153, p. 106). Unlike Saffrey, however, I am convinced that it was not Syrianus who had "established within the Neoplatonic school of Athens a tradition of great respect for Aristotle, even when he had to be refuted",[160] for we have seen above that this tradition already existed in the time of its founder Plutarch, and well before the existence of the school, in Porphyry and Iamblichus. We shall see, moreover, with the help of the research of D.J. O'Meara, what influence Iamblichus' treatise *On Pythagoreanism* had exerted on Syrianus' commentary on the *Metaphysics*. It does not seem to me quite correct to say (pp. 213 ff.) that "what Aristotle would always be reproached with was precisely that he stopped with the Intellect in the doctrine of the first god, without ascending as far as the One". Porphyry already thought that in book Λ of the *Metaphysics*, the system of *ousiai* implied the transcendence of the One (cf. above, p. 61 ff.), as did Syrianus (cf. above, note 85, p. 28), and we shall see that late Neoplatonists affirmed, also basing themselves on book Λ, that the goal of Aristotle's philosophy was the One. We do not have the opinion either of Iamblichus or of the other Neoplatonists on this subject, except, probably, that of Themistius.[161]

In D.J. O'Meara, the mention of this introductory text by Syrianus is part of a detailed investigation on Iamblichus' influence on the work of Syrianus, and more specifically of Iamblichus' treatise *On Pythagoreanism* on Syrianus' commentary on books B, Γ, M and N of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.[162] O'Meara first wonders why Syrianus commented upon only these four books of the *Metaphysics*, and he reaches the following conclusion:[163] "The surviving books of Syrianus' Commentary … give the general impression that for some parts of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Alexander's Aristotelian commentary could serve, but for those parts where the issues were unclear and (especially) where Aristotle attacked Platonism-Pythagoreanism a detailed commentary was required. In other words, for a Platonist, a complete new commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* is not needed: for parts of the work Alexander's commentary suffices". According to O'Meara, Syrianus seems to have also agreed with the contents of book Γ of the *Metaphysics*, because he contented himself with giving a

160 H.D. Saffrey 1987, p. 211.

161 Cf. above, pp. 95–97.

162 D.J. O'Meara 1989, *Pythagoras Revived* …, pp. 119–124 and 128–141.

163 D.J. O'Meara 1989, *Pythagoras Revived* …, p. 120.

paraphrase of it, and referring the reader to Alexander's commentary (I would add that one must also take into account the possibility that some parts of the *Metaphysics* had already been commented upon by previous Neoplatonists: thus, for this book Λ, by Themistius, and probably by Porphyry and Iamblichus as well.[164] In any case, book Λ was used by the two last-named philosophers, as it was by later Neoplatonists, to prove the harmony of Aristotle's doctrines with those of Plato, even at the level of the intelligibles and beyond). According to O'Meara (p. 122), the commentary on the *Metaphysics* by Asclepius, the student of Ammonius, contains some indications suggesting that Syrianus had also commented at least upon parts of book Z, and perhaps also of book A. On the same page, O'Meara points out that Syrianus makes use of the backdating of Aristotle's doctrines: we learn that Aristotle owes his treatise *On generation and corruption* to the Pythagorean Ocellus, his *Physics* to the Pythagorean Timaeus, the character from the Platonic dialogue *Timaeus*, and his *Categories* to Archytas.[165] I would add that this method already had a lengthy history, beginning with some Middle Platonists.[166] Finally, O'Meara (pp. 128–141) proposes a detailed, convincing explanation of the relations between Syrianus' commentary on books M and N of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and Iamblichus' treatise *On Pythagoreanism*. In his exposition of the Pythagorean-Platonic system in connection with the criticisms of Aristotle, Syrianus made broad use of books III–VII of Iamblichus' treatise. A few differences between Iamblichus and Syrianus can be explained by the evolution of the Neoplatonic system in the direction of an ever-increasing multiplication of ontological strata. D.J. O'Meara's book shows, in an exemplary way, to what extent Syrianus depends on the previous Neoplatonic tradition, both for his doctrinal system and for his tendency toward the harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, a dependency that has not often been taken into account by historians of ancient philosophy, who content themselves with talking about his influence on posterity.

In this context, I can only mention very briefly the article by M. Bonelli entitled "Dialectique et philosophie première: Syrianus et Alexandre d'Aphrodise",[167] whose goal is to "point out the mixture of Platonic and Aristotelian elements elaborated by Syrianus, as well as the influence of Alexander on this elaboration of Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics".[168] She demonstrates that

164 Cf. above, p. 60 ff. (Porphyry) and p. 66 with note 38 (Iamblichus).

165 Syrianus, *In Metaph.*, 175,8–11; 192,16–21; cf. *In Hermog.* II 58,23–25.

166 Cf. above, p. 43 (at the bottom) f.; p. 51 f. and p. 67.

167 M. Bonelli 2009, pp. 423–437.

168 M. Bonelli 2009, p. 424.

"sometimes, the Aristotelianism that Syrianus accepts and elaborates is not the Aristotelianism of Aristotle, but that of Alexander of Aphrodisias, partly modified",[169] a subject we briefly touched upon above.[170] She concludes, agreeing with D.J. O'Meara[171] although she does not seem to know his work: "… in the commentary on book Γ, he [*sc*. Syrianus] seems to agree with what Aristotle and Alexander say about philosophical science, although adding Platonic elements to it, with, it seems to me, the belief in a harmony between Plato and Aristotle. For this operation, I suggest that Alexander played a role that must not be neglected".[172]

The article by the late M. Frede, entitled "Syrianus on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*",[173] published in an unfinished state owing to its author sudden death, constitutes, for our subject, a very interesting supplement to the work of D.J. O'Meara. Except with regard to his teacher Plutarch of Athens, the author is not interested in Syrianus' historical position, but he tries to elucidate Syrianus' attitude toward Aristotle, and especially to that philosopher's *Metaphysics*. After a short introduction on the life and work of Syrianus, M. Frede begins by emphasizing (p. 12), basing himself on Syrianus' prologue to his commentary to book Μ of the *Metaphysics* which we have just cited, that he had a positive attitude, not only toward Aristotle's treatises concerning logic, the natural sciences, and perhaps ethics as is generally held, but perhaps toward a large part of the *Metaphysics* itself. Indeed, Syrianus said in his prologue that one had to be particularly grateful toward Aristotle for his *Metaphysics*, which had made him a "benefactor of humanity". An essential part of Syrianus' admiration for Aristotle is precisely based, as Frede rightly emphasizes, on this treatise of the *Metaphysics*, an admiration for which Syrianus himself provides the reasons. The first reason is everything that Aristotle says in it about forms that are united to matter and definitions (Frede, p. 34, thinks of book Ζ of the *Metaphysics* in this regard); the second is that Aristotle demonstrates there, adding proofs insofar as was possible given that these causes are beyond discursive reasoning, that there are divine, immobile causes that transcend the physical world. The third reason for this admiration is, according to Frede, the following: in his opinion, the phrase from the prologue that speaks of "the guide in such philosophical research" as the benefactor of the human race, very probably means

169 M. Bonelli 2009, p. 424.

170 Cf. the opinion of S. Fazzo 2008, above, p. 91 at the bottom.

171 Cf. above, p. 108 at the bottom.

172 M. Bonelli 2009, p. 437.

173 M. Frede 2009, "Syrianus on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*".

that according to Syrianus, Aristotle has succeeded, with his *Metaphysics*, in inaugurating an indispensable new kind of philosophical research: research concerning beings as such and their causes. It is Syrianus' appropriation of this Aristotelian idea of a "metaphysical science" that Frede proposed to describe in detail, under the sub-heading "How did Syrianus think we should understand Aristotle's *Metaphysics*?", a chapter he was unfortunately unable to conclude, and which is of very great interest despite its incomplete state, although it no longer concerns our subject directly.

The brief interpretation given by R.L. Cardullo of this prologue to Book M in her precious book *Siriano esegeta di Aristotele*[174] reaches substantially the same results as M. Frede.

I do not really know what J.M. Dillon meant, in his excellent "Introduction", concerning the laudatory title of "benefactor of humanity" which Syrianus gives to Aristotle in the first paragraph of his prologue, when he writes the following sentences: "We need not doubt that Syrianus' expression of admiration for Aristotle is sincerely meant, but it also undoubtedly serves a rhetorical purpose, as a foil to what is to follow, since these are more or less the last kind words that we are going to hear about Aristotle for the rest of the commentary. Indeed, straightway things begin to go downhill".[175] One of two things must be true: either Syrianus is sincere when he praises Aristotle, or he is not, exaggerating Aristotle's qualities without believing in them. Can one be sincere while not being so? In any case, Chr. Helmig[176] has interpreted Dillon's phrases as favoring rhetorical exaggeration, and therefore insincerity. It is true that the first part of the prologue serves the purpose of paving the way for the second, but in my opinion it was not written with the ulterior motive of 'sugar-coating' what was to be his criticism of Aristotle in the second part, but with the intention of proving his objectivity. The sincerity of his praise of Aristotle in the first part of his prologue has, moreover, been verified thanks to R.L. Cardullo's work on the fragments of his commentaries on Aristotle's *Organon*, which testify to his tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and of Aristotle. The fact that he taught the Aristotelian cycle, including the *Metaphysics*, as 'Lesser Mysteries' in preparation for the 'Greater Mysteries' of the Platonic cycle, constitutes a supplementary proof of this.

174 L. Cardullo 1995, pp. 57–58.

175 J. Dillon, "Introduction", ch. 4, p. 12, in J. Dillon—D.J. O'Meara, 2006, *Syrianus, On Aristotle, Metaphysics 13–14*.

176 Chr. Helmig 2009, p. 360.

Syrianus' attitude toward some of Aristotle's attacks against the Platonic doctrine of ideas in book Z of the *Metaphysics* is the subject of a complementary article by R.L. Cardullo, which has already been mentioned. After citing Syrianus' prologue, which we have just discussed, she remarks:[177] "at the moment when he was preparing to comment on the *Metaphysics*, and particularly on the books of the *Metaphysics* in which Aristotle harshly attacks the Platonic doctrine of Principles, Syrianus could not do otherwise than come to the defense of Plato and refute, point by point, Aristotle's 'sophistical' or 'eristic' arguments (Syr., *In Meta.*, 1,22; 2,1; 13,10 and *passim*). However, the defense of Plato aims at an objective judgement: Syrianus' examination of Aristotle's text must, as he himself says, be critical and impartial". In what follows, to describe Syrianus' way of proceeding, R.L. Cardullo interprets eight passages from Syrianus' commentary on Book Z of the *Metaphysics*, passages which are preserved in the commentary on the same treatise by Asclepius, and which deal with the question of the substantiality of universals.[178] From this rich demonstration, owing to lack of space, I can only quote the preamble by Asclepius, with the commentary by R.L. Cardullo on the whole of the first passage (Ascl., *In Met.*, 433,9–30). Asclepius' preamble is as follows:

> In support of Plato's theses, the philosopher Syrianus contradicts these ten arguments by Aristotle, and says that if Aristotle denies [as substances] the universals that are confused and generated after things (συγκεχυμένα και ὑστερογενῆ) and which have their being in our imagination, as for instance the notion one has of man as such, he does well. Indeed, these things are not really substances, but have all their being relative to us. If, by contrast, "Aristotle—says Syrianus—denies as substances the universals that are in the multiple things (τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς) then Aristotle does not speak as he should; and in fact, not only does he not deny them, but he postulates them.

R.L. Cardullo comments as follows (p. 204): "Aristotle thus maintains that the universal cannot be the substance either of all the things to which it is attributed, or of one of them. For it is impossible that it be the substance of them all, and if it were the substance of a single individual, then that individual would also be all the others, since beings whose substance is one, that is, whose

177 R.L. Cardullo 1993, "Syrianus défenseur de Platon contre Aristote", p. 200. Cf. also L. Cardullo 2003, "'Come le frecce dei Traci …'. Siriano contro Aristotele a proposito di due aporie di Metafisica B sul soprasensibile".

178 Asclepius, *In Metaph.*, pp. 433,9–436,6.

quiddity is one, are also one and the same being. Syrianus therefore replies by distinguishing two different meanings and modes of being of the καθόλου: on the one hand, the ἔννοια, or concept that is born in our imagination and is posterior to the birth of things; on the other, the Idea, or paradigm which is unique in its kind, in which many sensible things participate. The former universal, confused and posterior to the things from which it derives, is not really a substance; it is bereft of its own originary reality, since it exists only as a function and by virtue of the conception of our imagination; Aristotle is therefore right to deny its substantiality. Yet there is a second mode of being of the universal: this time, a mode of being that is authentic, real, and substantial. And since the substantiality of this universal—which is one in kind—is different from the substantiality proper to particular substance—which is one in number—nothing prevents a multiplicity of things from participating in that universal". Subsequently, Syrianus tries to show that Aristotle's reasoning suffers from "a basic defect, that of having considered as synonymous terms that are in fact homonymous".[179] After dealing with and commenting on all the texts, R.L. Cardullo concludes (p. 214): "It seems to me that Syrianus is also definitely trying to reconcile Plato and Aristotle, and to prove that both philosophers are not so distant from one another on a theoretical level. Indeed, as the testimony of Asclepius has shown, he notes that the same problems can be developed and solved in a frankly anti-Platonic way in some books of the *Metaphysics*, whereas in other contexts they had been solved by Aristotle himself in conformity with Plato's teaching. Thus, the distinction carried out in the *Categories* between 'universal part' and 'particular part', and between 'essential quality' and 'pure and simple quality', a distinction to which Aristotle does not refer in the passage of the *Metaphysics* commented on by Asclepius, would, according to Syrianus, have allowed him … to solve certain *aporiai* on the universals".

As Cardullo has clearly shown, the testimonies of Asclepius manifest an attitude that is not merely objective, but even conciliatory with regard to Aristotle's attacks. He avoids, as much as possible, a frontal counter-attack, correcting Aristotle by means of Aristotle. It is the same method—quoting Aristotle against Aristotle—that J. Dillon[180] points out, giving a few examples, in Syrianus' commentary on books M and N of the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle combats certain key doctrines of the ancient Pythagoreans and the ancient Platonists. In many cases, however, Syrianus had no choice but to vigorously defend the Pythagoreans and Plato against Aristotle, by attributing

179 R.L. Cardullo, 1993, p. 205.

180 J. Dillon 2006, pp. 17–19.

to them, it is true, a system which, as J. Dillon explains, "owes its origins to much more recent sources, notably Iamblichus" and represents "an exotic amalgam developed first, so far as we can discern, by Eudorus of Alexandria in the first century BC". In Syrianus, a 'harmonization' of authentically Platonic doctrines with Pseudo-Pythagorean works, Orphism, the *Chaldaean Oracles* etc., together with a very special interpretation of the works of Plato himself, goes hand in hand, as it already did with other Neoplatonists before him, with the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

There is nothing surprising about this attitude of frank defense of Plato, which is, as we shall see, less hostile than that of Proclus. Can one expect anything else on the part of a Platonist confronted with open attacks against his primary teachers? As long as the disagreements were not associated with frontal assaults, one could, to the best of one's abilities, and more or less often according to the the temperament of each interpreter, try to make them disappear, or silence them. Let us recall, in this context, what Philoponus reported concerning the dissent among the Platonists of his time[181] over the question of whether or not Aristotle accepted Plato's Ideas. We have seen that Porphyry had also vigorously combatted Aristotle on a doctrinal point that he thought was incompatible with the teachings of Plato, in this case the soul as entelechy.[182] We have been able to observe, and shall observe again,[183] that in the meantime, probably beginning with Iamblichus, the Neoplatonic interpreters had succeeded, albeit in different ways, in making Aristotle and Plato agree on the doctrine of the human soul. Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, in which the author affirms that he is closely following Iamblichus' works on the soul, testifies to the latter's considerable contribution to the process of harmonization[184] of the doctrines on the soul. We have also reported the opinion of D.J. O'Meara, according to whom the very criticisms that Syrianus develops on the subject of Aristotle's theses in books M and N of the *Metaphysics* must have been based, at least in part, on the objections of Iamblichus, contained in the seventh book of his treatise *On Pythagoreanism*.[185] Finally, let us emphasize that we do not possess any other commentaries on books M and N of the *Metaphysics* than that of Syrianus, and that we therefore crucially lack points of comparison.

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181 Cf. above, p. 69 (at the bottom) with note 47.

182 Cf. above, pp. 54–60.

183 Cf. above, p. 70 f. and p. 101 ff., and below, p. 161 ff.

184 Cf. above, p. 70, n. 50 and O. Ballériaux 1992, "A la recherche du Jamblique perdu".

185 Cf. above, p. 109.

I would therefore say that Syrianus takes his place in the tradition, already lengthy, of the movement that tried to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato—a movement of which, moreover, we know only a few scattered elements. By way of conclusion, I endorse—except for the adverb 'necessarily' in his third phrase, which I would omit—the following judgment by J. Dillon:[186] "I think … that the *Commentary on the Metaphysics* is remarkable among Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle for its strongly adversative tone. This, however, is largely conditioned by the polemical nature of the subject matter. It does not necessarily mean that Syrianus had withdrawn from the position established by Porphyry of the basic concordance between Plato and Aristotle; it is just that he is not prepared to let Aristotle get away with the sort of sniping that he indulges in in *Metaphysics* 13 and 14".

6 Macrobius (Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, circa 400)

The essential influence that the works of Plotinus and Porphyry exerted on the literary production of such Latin authors as Cornelius Labeo, Firmicus Maternus, Calcidius and Macrobius is unanimously acknowledged today. On this subject, I refer to the succinct historical overview by P. Hadot on the Latin Neoplatonic branch from Plotinus to the 5th century.[187] As far as Macrobius is concerned, it has been demonstrated that when, in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, he mentions Plotinus as his source, one must expect him to use, at least occasionally, the interpretation of Plotinus by Porphyry,[188] which was easier to understand. In any case, the Neoplatonic system that emerges in the background of his *Commentary* does not go beyond the ontological structure of that of Porphyry, and has more affinity with the latter than with the system of Plotinus.[189]

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186 J. Dillon 2006, p. 20.

187 P. Hadot 1968, *Porphyre et Victorinus* 1, pp. 80–86. For the biography of Macrobius and the details of the interpretation of the *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, I refer to the excellent work by M. Armisen-Marchetti 2001 and 2003, *Macrobe, Commentaire au Songe de Scipion*.

188 For instance, P. Henry 1934, *Plotin et l'Occident*, has demonstrated that when (at 1, 8, 5) he names Plotinus' treatise *On Virtues* as his source, he bases himself in reality not on *Enn.* 1,2 (Περὶ ἀρετῶν), but on *Sentence* 32 of Porphyry's *Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes*.

189 I quote an example given by P. Hadot 1968, *Porphyre et Victorinus* 1, p. 458, n. 9 and p. 459, note 2 concerning *In Somn. Sc.*, 1,14,6: "God, who is and is called the first cause, is the one principle and origin of all that is or appears to be. By the superabundant fecundity of his

Taken in isolation, the long, perfectly clear refutation that Macrobius develops (*In somm. Sc.*, III, 15,1–16,26) against the objections that Aristotle had formulated in various parts of his work against the Platonic doctrine of the soul's automotricity does not contain any sign of a tendency on Macrobius' part to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle: according to Macrobius, Aristotle is wrong right across the board. Nevertheless, in my opinion it would be a mistake to wish to conclude from this fact a general hostility toward Aristotle on Macrobius' part. Indeed, we encountered above[190] the same attitude with regard to the same subject (one of Aristotle's objections against the soul's automotricity) in Porphyry, who is nevertheless known for his harmonizing tendency. Given the doctrinal context in which Macrobius' work is situated, therefore, I consider it highly probable that his refutation of Aristotle's criticism with regard to the soul's automotricity should not be interpreted as a sign of total hostility toward Aristotle. Instead, like the excerpts of Porphyry's critique on the same subject, it should be seen in the context of a strong tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato. The way Macrobius talks about Aristotle, moreover, testifies to his great esteem for the philosopher, despite his criticism on the subject of the soul's automotricity. Here are two examples: "To claim that it [= the soul], which moves all things, is immobile, is not fitting for Aristotle, whose greatness has manifested itself in other research …".[191] "In what follows as well, this great man Aristotle (*vir tantus*), more serious than anyone in other respects (*et alias ultra ceteros serius*), seems to be joking …".[192] Macrobius tries to find an explanation for Aristotle's odd behavior on the subject of the soul's automotricity, an explanation which, moreover, bears a great resem-

majesty, this God produced the Intellect out of himself. This intellect, which is called νοῦς, maintains a full resemblance with its author, insofar as it contemplates the Father, but it produces the soul from itself when it turns its attention toward inferior things. The soul, in its turn, insofar as it turns its gaze toward its father, takes on its appearance, and gradually, when its gaze turns away from this direction, it lowers itself to the point of producing bodies, while itself remaining incorporeal. From the Intellect whence it is born, then, it possesses the most pure reason called the λογικόν, and it receives from its own nature the ability to produce sensation and to produce growth, one of which is called αἰσθητικόν, the other φυτικόν." In his note 2, P. Hadot first lists all the resemblances to Plotinus contained in this text, in order to go on to point out the differences: the twofold gaze of the Intellect, which Plotinus would not have admitted, but which is found in the second God of Numenius. P. Hadot concludes: "In the case of Macrobius …, we are in the presence of Numenian formulations taken up by Porphyry …"

190 Cf. above, pp. 56–60.

191 Macrobius, *In somn. Sc.*, II,16,26, p. 82 Armisen-Marchetti.

192 Macrobius, *In somn. Sc.*, II,16,15, p. 79 Armisen-Marchetti.

blance to the one by Proclus,[193] when the latter accuses Aristotle of wanting to compete with Plato. Macrobius writes: "But such a great man (as Aristotle), it seems to me, could not have sinned out of ignorance: closing his eyes to the recourse to such quibbles, he deliberately worked for himself",[194] that is, for his own reputation. Like Porphyry, whose work testifies to a very considerable tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, but who had nevertheless refuted rather violently, as we have seen,[195] Aristotle's criticism with regard to the soul's automotricity, Macrobius too must have criticized Aristotle on the same subject, while still defending, in other respects, the concord between the two philosophers. Contrasting with this way of proceeding, we have seen above[196] the traces of a completely harmonizing interpretation of the same kind of criticism of Aristotle on the part of Themistius, opposing Porphyry, and we will encounter later on[197] a similarly conciliatory commentary in Simplicius.

Macrobius' refutation of Aristotle's critique of the Platonic doctrine of the soul's automotricity is too long to be dealt with appropriately in the context of the present study. On this subject, I refer the reader to the excellent annotated translation by M. Armisen-Marchetti.[198] I will merely add a few remarks: before beginning his refutation of Aristotle, Macrobius first explains the method he had followed in elaborating it:

> Against these arguments, so subtle, ingenious, and plausible, we have the duty to take up arms, following the disciples of Plato, who have undermined the project by which Aristotle had tried to invalidate the definition, so veridical and solid, of their master. Yet I am not so reckless or rash as to count only on my talent to defeat Aristotle or to support Plato. Insofar as each of the great men who took pride in the name of Platonists has left behind a defensive argument or two to assert the value of their own work, I have collected and grouped them into one corpus, forming a continuous defense, adding to it that which, after them, was either permitted to think or possible to interpret boldly.[199]

193 Cf. below, p. 123 (at the beginning of the quotation).

194 Macrobius, *In somn. Sc.*, II,15,18, p. 70 Armisen-Marchetti.

195 Cf. above, pp. 56–60.

196 Cf. above, pp. 56–60.

197 Cf. below, p. 164 ff.

198 M. Armisen-Marchetti 2003, *Macrobe. Commentaire au Songe de Scipion*, vol. II, pp. 58–82 with notes 276–363.

199 Macrobius, *In somn. Sc.*, II,15,2, p. 66 Armisen-Marchetti.

Like M. Armisen-Marchetti,[200] I am of the opinion that one should not doubt the veracity of what Macrobius says, or his ability to carry out such a synthesis. In fact, Aristotle's critical remarks were scattered throughout various works, especially in his *Physics* and in his treatise *De anima*, and the refutations of his criticisms were logically to be sought in Neoplatonic commentaries on these two works, but also in the commentaries on the Platonic dialogues which, like the *Timaeus*, alluded to the doctrine attacked by Aristotle. Why would Macrobius not have been able to make a synthesis of these *disiecta membra*, something that would be within the capabilities of many researchers of our time, if they still had access to as many works as the Latin author? And if we discover some similarities, for instance in Porphyry's arguments against Aristotle (reported by Themistius) and Macrobius,[201] this can be explained just as well by a direct reading of Porphyry as by the necessarily large homogeneity in this kind of arguments. Like most scholars, I am nevertheless convinced that directly or indirectly, it is the Porphyrian spirit that guides Macrobius' work.

7 Hermias of Alexandria (Student of Syrianus around 430)

Hermias, who was born and died at Alexandria, was, along with Proclus, the student of Syrianus at Athens, and he married one of the latter's relatives.[202] We have the right to assume that like his fellow-disciple Proclus, he first went through, under the guidance of Syrianus, the 'lesser mysteries' of the Aristotelian cycle before being initiated into the 'greater mysteries' of Platonic studies. His commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*, the only work of his to have survived, testifies to the instruction he had received on this subject from his teacher Syrianus. The question of whether this commentary consists only in notes taken at Syrianus' classes, or whether it is a written version of one of his own courses given later at Alexandria, and based more or less on his Athenian notes, has, in my view, been solved in favor of the second alternative.[203] What interests us

200 M. Armisen-Marchetti, *Macrobe, In somn. Sc.*, II, p. 193, note 316.

201 For instance, the recourse to Stoic doctrines: Macrobe, *In somn. Sc.*, II,14,2 and Porphyry, in *Themistius. On Aristotle On the Soul*, p. 16, 36 Todd.

202 Cf. above p. 8 f. and p. 13.

203 Cf. above, p. 8 f. Note, however, that as seasoned an expert in Neoplatonism as D.J. O'Meara had a different opinion in his *Pythagoras revived* …, dating from 1989. He writes on p. 125: "At any rate the grounds against reading Hermeias' *Commentary* as based simply on Syrianus' lectures are inadequate". I do not know what he thinks now. In any case, and this seems to me to be a decisive factor, Hermeias occasionally opposes Syrianus' opinion,

here is the fact that the commentary contains clear signs of an adherence to the tendency harmonizing the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. To be brief, I will content myself here with mentioning some of the places where Aristotle appears in the text (they are enumerated in the *Index Scriptorum* of Couvreur's edition), neglecting the anonymous allusions.

First of all, I quote Hermias' commentary on the "immortal seed" produced by dialectical speeches (*Phaedrus* 277A):

> "You see", Hermias comments *In Phaedr.*, "how Plato is immortal through Aristotle and Plotinus."
>
> p. 261,26 COUVREUR

The old method of 'back-dating'[204] is found at p. 51,32:

> Thus, all of Aristotle's logical theorems are anticipated in Plato, in whom they are to be found in discussions on realities themselves, and are not buried in methodological treatises alone

where we are to understand: as they are in Aristotle. At the same time, the belief, habitual among the Neoplatonists, in Plato's superiority with regard to Aristotle, comes to the surface in this phrase: a belief which, it must be repeated, does not exclude sometimes preferring Aristotle's views over those of Plato in questions concerning physical realities. A bit farther on (p. 52,7–15) there follows a little example of the implementation of harmonization:

> About opinion, that is, about the rational soul, he [Plato] says that it is acquired (ἐπίκτητον), that is, that it is introduced from outside—about this soul, Aristotle also says that it is the intellect introduced from outside,[205]—and that when we reach maturity, right opinions and knowledge develop in us (…) He [Plato] says that we aim at what is best and that *we tend toward what is best*, instead of saying 'toward the Good': everyone tends toward the Good.[206]

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and prefers that of Iamblichus, as for instance in *In Phaedr.*, p. 150,24 ff. Couvreur; cf. on this subject H. Bernard 1997, *Hermeias von Alexandrien* ...., pp. 13–19, and Cl. Moreschini 2009, "Alla scuola di Siriano ...", pp. 568–570.

204 Cf. above, p. 51 f.

205 Aristotle, *De gener. animal.*, II, 3, 736a28; 6, 744b22. This is, then, a case of the identification of the Neoplatonists' rational soul with Aristotle's intellect introduced from without.

206 Cf. Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, I,1,1094a3: … τἀγαθόν, οὗ πάντ' ἐφίεται.

Another, more detailed example of harmonization is provided on pages 104,14–106,16 Couvreur. A difficulty arises from the fact that Plato says that the rational human soul is moved by itself (αὐτοκίνητος), and that Aristotle, "who is not just anybody", doubts the existence of something moved by itself. One may, however, thinks Hermias, find that the two philosophers agree (οὐδὲ διαφωνοῦσιν).[207] Here is a summary of Hermias' argument, which is, moreover, not completely the same as those of Themistius and Simplicius on the same subject:[208] First of all, Aristotle removes all bodily motion from souls, as do Plato and the Neoplatonists. Plato, for his part, shows that there are motions of the soul that are not corporeal, such as willing, observing, etc. It becomes clear from this that a cause (ἀρχή) of motion exists,[209] and that it is what is moved by itself. For what is 'moved by another' cannot be moved by something else that is 'moved by another' to infinity, for there exists neither infinity within being, nor any science of infinity. Hermias excludes a circular motion as cause of motion for other reasons. This cause of motion, which, according to Hermias, the two philosophers agree in identifying as the soul, is qualified by Plato as being moved by itself, and by Aristotle as immobile. However, says Hermias, one can learn that the cause of motion must be moved by itself from the doctrines of Aristotle himself, for instance the following: in all that exists, nature does not advance from one contrary to another with no intermediary, for instance from winter to summer without going through spring. Similarly, then, there must exist an intermediary between what is immobile and what is moved by another, which is what is moved by itself, and is simultaneously one in number and in subject. However, as Hermias emphasizes, what Aristotle designates as being self-moved, like the living being (οἷον τὸ ζῷον),[210] is not the subject of the present discussion, for according to Aristotle it is a compound of what is immobile and what is moved by another. Yet just as, according to Aristotle, there exists what is completely immobile, as the cause of all things, and there also exists, according to Aristotle, what is moved by something else, like bodies, there will also necessarily exist in the middle what is moved by itself, which is none other than the soul.

Finally, at page 180, 23–26, Hermias mentions without commentary the different opinions of Aristotle and Plato concerning the denominations of things.

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207 Hermias, *In Phaedr.*, p. 104,18–19 Couvreur: Ἴσως δὲ εὑρεθήσεται ὅπου οὐδὲ διαφωνοῦσιν οἱ φιλόσοφοι.

208 On Themistius, cf. above, pp. 56–60; for Simplicius, below, pp. 165 ff.

209 That is, since there exist two kinds of motion of different ontological levels, they must be preceded by a common cause.

210 Hermias, *In Phaedr.*, p. 105,15 ff. Couvreur.

According to Plato, names were originally given to the intelligibles, and the wise, having instructed themselves by means of the Ideas, gave names to the things in this world on the basis of them. Aristote, in contrast, thinks that names were originally given to sensible things. This is obviously an allusion to the difference in the two philosophers' opinions on the origin of names, whether they exist by nature (φύσει) or by convention (θέσει or συνθήκῃ). This allusion is based essentially on Aristotle, *De interpr.*, 16a21–29, a passage on which Ammonius, in his commentary on the *De interpretatione*, comments in a conciliatory way.[211] For his part, Hermias adds nothing to the simple observation of this disagreement between Plato and Aristotle. Does he judge that a discussion of these divergent opinions has no place in a commentary on the *Phaedrus*, and that one should rather talk about it in a commentary on Plato's *Cratylus* or on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*? The context seems to prove that he believes Plato is right,[212] but he provides no explanation for his preference.

One comes away from the reading of this commentary with the following impression. Hermias' general tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle is obvious, but it does not prevent him from occasionally simply recording a disagreement.

8 Proclus (412–485)

As far as I know, no one among historians of ancient philosophy would doubt the fact that Proclus, the favorite student of Syrianus and his successor at the head of the private Neoplatonic school of Athens, did indeed teach, in his turn, the entire preparatory Aristotelian cycle, nicknamed 'the lesser mysteries', which he himself had gone through with his teacher. We do not know whether this teaching sometimes assumed the written form of a commentary, but if this was the case, nothing of it has come down to us, except his *Elements of physics* (Στοιχείωσις φυσική). Thus, Ammonius, in the only commentary on an Aristotelian work which he himself set down in writing, the one on Aristotle's

211 Cf. Ammonius, *In De int.*, p. 34, 17 ff., as interpreted by A. Sheppard 1987, "Proclus' philosophical method of exegesis: the use of Aristotle and the Stoics in the commentary on the Cratylus", p. 147. The author suggests that Proclus' interpretation of this passage was similar to that of Ammonius, and hence conciliatory. Cf. also above, pp. 28–40.

212 Hermias, *In Phaedr.*, p. 180, 23–25 Couvreur: "He [= Plato] rightly says 'denomination', because he will have it that names were first established for intelligible things, and that the wise, who instruct themselves with the help of the Ideas, name the things down here on their basis".

De interpretatione, mentions the course of his teacher Proclus on the same subject in a highly laudatory way. All that has been preserved for us is a rather substantial part of Proclus' commentaries on Plato, including his commentary on Plato's *Parmenides*, the *summum* of Platonic theology in its role as the summit of the Platonic cycle. In this commentary, moreover, as elsewhere, he is assumed to closely follow the guidelines of the thought of Syrianus.

In the context of the teaching of the Aristotelian cycle, it is significant that according to David (Elias),[213] it was already Proclus who imposed the principle that before tackling the study of Aristotle's *Categories*, one had to deal with the following ten questions: 1. In how many ways, and according to what principles, did the philosophical sects receive their denominations? 2. What is the classification of Aristotle's works? 3. With what must one begin to tackle Aristotle's works? 4. What is the end (τέλος) of Aristotle's philosophy? 5. What are the means that lead us to this end? 6. What is the genre of Aristotle's works? 7. Why did Aristotle cultivate obscurity? 8. What are the qualities required of the exegete? 9. What are the qualities required of the auditor? 10. For each Aristotelian treatise, how many capital points are there to be examined beforehand, what are they, and what is their justification? This tenth question heralds a second series of six points, which represents a specific introduction to the *Categories* and to each of the treatises of the Aristotelian cursus.[214] The first set of ten points, and the second in six points, which had already been more or less traditional since the 3rd century, were dealt with at the beginning of the commentaries on the *Categories* by Ammonius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus, Simplicius, and David (Elias), but the first one is not yet found in the commentaries by Porphyry and by Boethius, which bolsters the affirmation by David (Elias). Indeed, one may conclude that on this point, Boethius was following

213 David (Elias), *In Cat*., p. 107, 24–26.

214 After having enumerated these ten chapters of the first introductory scheme, David (ibid.) refers to a treatise by Proclus entitled Συνανάγνωσις, in which Proclus emphasized the obligation to deal with these 10 introductory chapters, without, however, explaining the reason why. It is this hole that David (Elias) proposes to fill out. Even if one wishes to see the title indicated by David as a mere interpolation, the fact remains that the other part of the sentence does indeed give the impression that what is at issue is a *written* work by Proclus, which David (Elias) knew, and in which Proclus had codified the contents of the first scheme. As far as the introductions to the Platonic cycle are concerned, Proclus himself refers to a work of his that was similar to the one mentioned by David (Elias) for the Aristotelian cycle, but he does not give its title: *In Alc*. 19,2; 10,4; 11,16. Either two parallel works were extant by Proclus, one of them as an introduction to the Aristotelian cycle and the other an introduction to the Platonic cycle, or else both these introductions were united in the same treatise. Cf. I. Hadot et alii 1990, pp. 26–29 et 34 ff.

another Greek tradition, or one that was previous to the one established by Proclus at Athens and followed by all the so-called Alexandrian commentators, and Simplicius.[215] Later on, we will discuss the important role of these introductions, which, at least among these 6th-century Neoplatonists, prepared the student for a harmonizing interpretation of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, while preaching the superiority of Plato.

As we said, Proclus took the trouble to set down in writing a Στοιχείωσις φυσική (*Elements of Physics*) in two books, which has been preserved for us. In it, he tried to transform the essential points of what Aristotle had said on bodily motion in books six and eight of his *Physics* and at the beginning of his book *On the Heavens* into a series of hypotheses, followed by proofs in the form of syllogisms. The limits of such a method were well described by E.R. Dodds[216] in his preface to Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, but the fact that Proclus thought it useful to make this considerable effort proves that he saw in Aristotle's *Physics* an indispensable base for Platonic philosophical instruction. However, let us allow him to explain, in the Prologue to the first book of his commentary on the *Timaeus*, what he thinks of Aristotle's *Physics* as compared to Plato's *Timaeus*, the dialogue understood as the paradigmatic treatise on physics, which, according to Proclus, had as its source a work by the Pythagorean Timaeus of Locris:[217]

> With regard to the marvelous (δαιμόνιος) Aristotle, it seems to me that insofar as was possible, he arranged his entire treatise on Nature in a spirit of rivalry (ζηλώσας) with the teachings of Plato: he saw that some things are common to all the things that come about by nature: form, substrate, that from which the principle of motion arises, motion, time, place, all things which Plato has transmitted here: interval, time as an image of eternity, coming into existence together with the heaven, and the various kinds of motion and the auxiliary causes of natural phenomena; and some are proper to beings distinguished according to their essence. First among these are those that appertain to the Heavens, *in conformity with Plato* (τῷ Πλάτωνι συμφώνως) insofar as he postulates the Heavens to be ungenerated and made of the fifth essence—indeed, what is the

215 A detailed comparison of the treatment of the ten-point introductory scheme by the commentators Simplicius, Ammonius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) may be found in I. Hadot *et alii*, 1990 *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, pp. 48–160. Cf. also below, pp. 126–146.

216 E.R. Dodds, *Proclus, The Elements of Theology*, Oxford 1963, p. xiff.

217 Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, vol. i, pp. 6,21–7,16 Diehl.

> difference between calling it the 'fifth element' or the 'fifth world' and the 'fifth figure', as Plato called them (*Tim.* 55 C 5)?—second are the things that are common to the entire generative structure of generation, where, truly, one cannot have enough admiration for how Plato has very precisely determined both their essence and their powers, and correctly maintained both their harmony and their oppositions. Again, among these things concerning the sublunary world (γένεσιν), some pertain to meteorological phenomena, of which Plato revealed the principles, while Aristotle extended their teaching beyond the just measure. Others tend toward the consideration of living beings, all things which have been clearly articulated in Plato in accordance with all the causes, both those that have the value of ends and those that are merely accessory, whereas in Aristotle they have been scarcely and seldom considered from the viewpoint of the formal cause. For he usually goes no further than matter, explaining physical phenomena by its means, and thereby showing us how far he lags behind his master's exposition.

In comparing this passage from Proclus with Syrianus' prologue to book M (13) of the *Metaphysics*, cited above p. 106 f., H.D. Saffrey[218] quite rightly observes: "He [Syrianus] strongly underlines his admiration for Aristotle as a logician, moralist or philosopher of nature, but he reserves his judgment when he reveals Aristotle's attacks on the subject of the Platonic first principles. Proclus will insist even more than his Teacher on the divergences between Aristotle and Plato, since he will emit on the *Physics* the same overall judgment that Syrianus emits on the *Metaphysics*, and will go so far as to say: 'As far as the marvelous Aristotle is concerned, my view is that he has arranged his entire treatise on Nature, insofar as was possible, in a spirit of rivalry with the teachings of Plato', and his commentary on the *Timaeus* will establish the superiority of Plato over Aristotle every chance he gets". Indeed, here as elsewhere, we get the clear impression that Proclus really does not like Aristotle as a person.

In addition to this, we recognize in this passage the old procedures, inherited from Pythagoreanizing Platonism and from Middle Platonism, of backdating (= everything Aristotle wrote is already found in Plato), and of the distinction between an Aristotle who is more of a philosopher of nature, and a Plato who is more of a theologian. Apart from the fact that a harmonizing tendency is nevertheless manifested very clearly in this passage, which culminates in the

218 H.D. Saffrey 1987, "Comment Syrianus … considérait-il Aristote?", p. 208 ff.

assimilation of Aristotle's fifth element to Plato's fifth figure, the judgment Proclus emits on Aristotle's various works concerning nature completely prefigures what will be said more clearly by the Alexandrian commentators and Simplicius with regard to the second point of the first introductory scheme: "What is the classification of Aristotle's works?". Indeed, in the passage cited, Proclus concedes some value to the Aristotelian treatises *On Nature* (*Physics*), *On the Heavens*, and *On Generation and Corruption*, but with regard to the *Meteorologica* he is of the opinion that Aristotle "has distended his teaching beyond the proper measure" and that, in his treatises on animals and plants, he has most often neglected research on causes. It is interesting to observe that the chapter on the classification of Aristotle's writings, and more specifically on the physical subdivision of the theoretical writings (contained in the treatment of the second point of the first introductory scheme to the commentaries on the *Categories* by Ammonius, Olympiodorus, Philoponus, David [Elias] and by Simplicius), indeed contains only those Aristotelian works on nature that have as their subject the search for the causes and general principles that govern it: thus, the works in question are the *Physics*, the treatises *On the Heavens*, *On Generation and Corruption*, the *Meteorologica*, and *On the Soul*, with the last-named treatise, compared to an amphibian, forming a transition to the *Metaphysics*. As Olympiodorus says in his commentary on the *Meteorologica*, this treatise is the last physical treatise that is an investigation on causes.[219] Still according to Olympiodorus, however, this last-named treatise is considered as dealing in part with subjects that are not properly philosophical, and this is the reason why the style used in this treatise is clear.[220] As far as Aristotle's studies on animals and plants are concerned, they are excluded from the physical subdivision of the theoretical works, which contains the works that are part of the Aristotelian cycle.[221]

Although Proclus exerted a deep influence on the programming of the Aristotelian cycle of Neoplatonic studies, as it was put into practice particularly among the Neoplatonists who taught at Alexandria and in Simplicius, he is, among all the Neoplatonists known to us, the one who set the most narrow limits to the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

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219 Olympiodorus, *In Meteor.*, p. 9,19–25 Stüve.

220 Olympiodore, *Prol.*, p. 11,19–24 Busse; *In Meteor.*, p. 4,16–27 Stüve. With regard to the stylistic obscurity "willed" by Aristotle in his treatises considered as pertaining to philosophy, cf. above, p. 78 and note 76. Cf. below, pp. 136–139. For *On the Soul*, cf. Olympiodorus, *In Meteor.*, p. 3, 3–4, 11 Stüve, and Simplicius, *In De anima*, p. 3, 4–21 Hayduck.

221 For details, cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, pp. 63–93.

9 The Harmonizing Tendency in the Introductions to the Commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* of Ammonius and His School (Philoponus, Olympiodorus, David [Elias]) and in Simplicius

In the preceding chapter, we spoke of the role Proclus played in codifying the introductory schemes to the *Categories*, the first work by Aristotle read by students beginning the Aristotelian cycle of Neoplatonic studies. I have already enumerated (p. 122 f.) the ten obligatory points of the first introductory scheme, which was intended to provide students with a specific introduction to the philosophy of Aristotle, after they had already benefitted from a general introduction to philosophy *tout court*, by tackling Porphyry's *Isagoge*. These ten introductory points prescribed by Proclus were invariably dealt with (only the order of the questions is changeable), and with a clear tendency toward the harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, in the five sixth-century commentaries on the *Categories* that have come down to us: i.e., those by Ammonius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus, David (Elias) and Simplicius. However, only the commentary by Simplicius has come down to us in its written form, whereas the four other commentaries are redactions by students from their teacher's oral courses. It should also be emphasized that Simplicius did not write his commentary during or shortly after his studies under Ammonius at Alexandria, but after his later sojourn at the school of Athens under Damascius and his departure for Persia with Damascius and some of his other students. Self-quotations allow us to establish the order of three of his commentaries, as follows: *In De caelo*—*In Phys*.—*In Cat*. Since the commentary on the *Physics* was written after the death of Damascius, which is dated after 538, the commentary on the *Categories* is therefore also later than 538. Consequently, it was conceived at a time when Simplicius had already undergone the extensive influence of Damascius, who, for his part, was following in the footsteps of his own teacher Isidore, who had taught at Alexandria in a pure Iamblichan spirit.[222] Simplicius tells[223] how Damascius, owing to his sympathy for Iamblichus, had

222 Cf. Damascius, *The Philosophical History* [= *Vita Isidori*], fr. 34 A Athanassiadi: "He (*scil.* Isidore) had a mind which was lofty and the ability to induce spiritual perfection, being not involved with the things of this world, but leaping up immediately on the smallest pretext towards the most exalted contemplation. He was rooted in the very purity of the Platonic ideas, which he did not interpret in the accustomed manner of the majority of philosophers, but after Plato in the extraordinary subtleties of Iamblichus".

223 Simplicius, *In Phys*., vol. 1, p. 795,11–17 Diels: "All the philosophers after Proclus and down to my time, more or less, followed Proclus not only on this detail, but in all the other dogmas,

reconsidered many of the dogmas of Proclus. Simplicius followed his teacher in this reversal, for we know from his own words that in his commentaries on the *Categories*, the treatise *On the soul*, and on book Λ of the *Metaphysics*, he had closely followed the corresponding works of Iamblichus,[224] who was a fervent defender of the harmonizing tendency.[225] Although Simplicius was without doubt a member of the school of Athens, nevertheless he did not adhere to the much more critical orientation toward Aristotle of this school under Proclus, but, like Priscianus of Lydia, to the more conciliatory attitude issuing from the pro-Iamblichan impulse provided by Isidore and Damascius, which renewed contact with the tendency that reigned under Plutarch of Athens and his student Hierocles.[226] We shall see that on the part of Proclus' student Ammonius and his school, a similar movement arose toward a greater harmonization of the thought of Aristotle and of Plato; an overall tendency that did not exclude differences in details.

9.1 *Aristotle as Plato's Successor*

Since I have commented on the first ten-point introduction of the five aforementioned authors in an entire book,[227] provided with lists of textual parallels, common vocabulary and parallel arguments, I will limit myself here to provid-

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except for Asclepiodotus, Proclus' most gifted student, and our Damascius. The former, because of his immense talent, took pleasure in innovating in doctrinal matters, whereas Damascius, because of his love of work and his sympathy for Iamblichus, was not afraid to reconsider many of Proclus' dogmas".

224 Cf. for the commentary on the *Categories*, the text by Simplicius at page 67 f.; for the commentary on the *De anima*, cf. Simplicius, *In De an.*, p. 1,18 ff. Hayduck; for the commentary on book Λ, cf. above note 38, p. 66.

225 Cf. above, p. 69 f., the testimonies of David (Elias) and of Philoponus. Who were the philosophers who, in the time of Philoponus, still believed, according to him, that Aristotle had not attacked Plato's Ideas, but only Platonists who gave a bad interpretation of Plato's texts?

226 On Priscianus of Lydia, cf. above p. 102 (at the bottom) and below, p. 161 f.

227 I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius—Commentaire sur les Catégories*. Cf. I. Hadot 1992, "Aristote dans l'enseignement philosophique néoplatonicien: Les préfaces des commentaires sur les *Catégories*", in *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* 124 (1992), pp. 407–425, and in an English version I. Hadot 1991 "The role of the commentaries on Aristotle in the teaching of philosophy according to the prefaces of the Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories*". Cf. also I. Hadot 1997a, "Le commentaire philosophique continu dans l'Antiquité", and in a German version "Der fortlaufende philosophische Kommentar in der Antike", in W. Geerlings–Chr. Schulze (eds.), *Der Kommentar in Antike und Mittelalter*, Leiden–Boston–Köln 2002, pp. 183–199.

ing a brief indication of the texts that attest the tendency to harmonization most clearly. Let us begin with the first point, whose subject is "the denominations of the philosophical sects". To explain the name 'Peripatos' given to Aristotle's school, Ammonius[228] and Olympiodorus[229] say the following: Plato had the custom of walking (περιπατεῖν) while he taught, to fortify his body at the same time as his soul. His successors Xenocrates and Aristotle were therefore called "those of the Peripatos", but Aristotle taught at the Lyceum, whereas Xenocrates taught in the Academy. David (Elias) and Olympiodorus[230] specify that the former were called Λυκείοι περιπατητικοί and the latter Ἀκαδημικοὶ περιπατητικοί. Ammonius reports the same detail in his commentary on Porphyry's *Isagoge* (p. 46,12–13 Busse). In the case of some, Ammonius, Olympiodorus, and David (Elias) continue, the mention of the place disappeared from the name of the school, and they were thenceforth called only after the activity, hence 'Peripatetics'. For the others, by contrast, it was the activity that was no longer mentioned in the name of the school, so that they were named only after the place of teaching, hence 'Academics'. Olympiodorus[231] hastens to add that it was fitting that for Aristotle's students, the mention of the activity was preserved in the denomination of their school, for it was appropriate for Aristotle, who was full of the doctrines of his master Plato, to inherit the denomination proper to Plato. David (Elias) adds only a few things to this picture. He specifies that Plato's direct successor was his nephew Speusippus, and that Xenocrates and Aristotle succeeded Speusippus together. Philoponus,[232] who is more brief, tells how Plato had the custom of teaching while walking with his students and that Aristotle, upon succeeding him, received the nickname of 'Peripatetic', after this activity or accidentally. Simplicius, who is by far the most succinct commentator on this first point, only notes that the Peripatetics received their denomination after an accidental activity.[233]

What is striking in the explanations of Ammonius, Olympiodorus, David (Elias), and even, in a mitigated form, Philoponus, the future dissident, is the decidedly harmonizing tendency to make the school of Aristotle the direct prolongation of the school of Plato, and even, in the case of Olympiodorus, as the only true heir to Plato's teaching.

228 Ammonius, *In Cat.*, p. 3,9 ff. Busse.

229 Olympiodorus, *Proleg.*, p. 5,19 ff. Busse.

230 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 112,31 ff. Busse; Olympiodorus, *Proleg.* p. 5,24–26 Busse.

231 Olympiodorus, *Proleg.*, p. 5, 28 ff. Busse.

232 Philoponus, *In Cat.*, p. 3,4–7 Busse.

233 Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 4,4 Kalbfleisch.

9.2 *The Division of Aristotle's Works in a Neoplatonic Spirit*

I have already briefly spoken of the second introductory point, which concerns the typically Neoplatonic classification of the works of Aristotle, a classification that is described in a strictly identical way in the five commentators. This classification is not particularly significant for the harmonizing tendency, but it is interesting in the fact that it divides Aristotle's physical works into two groups, distinguishing them from one another by the ontological status of the objects they study, as well as by the method and the results of their research. The first group, which deals with causes, is formed by the *Physics*, the treatise *On the Heavens*, the treatise *On Generation and Corruption*, the *Meteorologica* and the treatise *On the Soul*, which, for its part, provides a transition to metaphysical studies. The second group deals only partially with causes, and for the most part studies the details of the sensible world, which (entirely in the Platonic spirit) cannot be the object of scientific research. It includes all the treatises concerning animals and plants, and was excluded from the Neoplatonic school curriculum. Obviously, the Peripatetics did not make this distinction, which corresponds exactly to the attitude expressed by Proclus in the text from his commentary on the *Timaeus* cited above,[234] and which may go back to Iamblichus. It should also be noted that already Porphyry does not seem to have commented on any work from the second group of physical works.

9.3 *The Neoplatonic One is the End* (τέλος) *of Both Plato's and Aristotle's Philosophy*

The treatment of the fourth point of the first introductory scheme, entitled "The end of Aristotle's philosophy",[235] is crucially important, not only as a testimony to the harmonizing tendency, but also because it shows, within the overall approach to Aristotle's philosophy, that there is no difference between the members of the school of Alexandria—Ammonius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) on the one hand—and on the other Simplicius, the representative of the Damascian branch of the School of Athens. The interpretation of the end of Aristotle's philosophy by the "Alexandrians" is by no means more sober and closer to Aristotle's actual thought than is the one by the "Athenian" Simplicius. In addition, this chapter brings out the fact that in the view of the Alexandrian commentators, Aristotle's philosophy does not equal Plato's, but is inferior to it.

234 Cf. above, p. 123 f.

235 Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 6,6–15 Kalbfleisch; Ammonius, *In Cat.*, p. 6,9–16 Busse.

David (Elias) is the only commentator to wonder, by way of an introduction, whether it is worthwhile to determine what the end of Aristotle's philosophy is.[236] From his comments, it emerges that the formulation of the end usually serves to orient the exegesis of Aristotle's treatises narrowly and right from the outset, and to exclude any interpretation that is not reconcilable with the end stated in response to the fourth preliminary question. As he says, once the end is known, one becomes more zealous, and those who do not know it are comparable to blind people who walk and are taken where they should not go. Thus, the definition of the end determines—and this is crucially important—, the entire overall interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy, just as, in the second six-point introductory scheme, the definition of the goal (σκοπός) of each Aristotelian treatise determines the interpretation of each particular treatise, within the limits of the first, general orientation.

Simplicius, Philoponus and David (Elias) raise only the question of the *telos* or end of Aristotle's philosophy, while Ammonius and Olympiodorus link to this question another one, concerning the usefulness of this philosophy. I quote Ammonius:

> Fourth … one must seek what is the end and the obvious usefulness of Aristotle's philosophy for us; and we say that it is the fact of being raised up toward the common principle (ἀρχή) of all things, and to know that it is unique (μία), incorporeal, indivisible (ἀμερής), ungraspable (ἀπερίληπτος), unlimited (ἀπεριόριστος), infinite in power (ἀπειροδύναμος), and goodness-in-itself (αὐτοαγαθότης). It is not merely good: it must be known that just as we say that the body that has received whiteness is white, with whiteness being the quality itself, so the body that has received goodness (τὴν ἀγαθότητα) and takes part in it is good, while goodness is a kind of essence (οὐσία) and original reality (ὕπαρξις). [This we will learn from Aristotle, who does not say it in just any way, nor without adducing proofs—in that case, he would be no different from an uneducated man—but with irrefutable proofs (or syllogistic demonstrations), in the place where he emphatically pronounces this famous, solemn verse: 'It is not good for many to govern. Let there be a single leader!'[237]][238]

236 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 119, 28–30.

237 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Λ (XII), 1076 a = Homer, *Iliad*, II, 204.

238 Ammonius, *In Cat.*, p. 6,9–16 Busse. I have placed between parentheses [] the text that Busse relegated to the critical apparatus, arbitrarily, in my view (cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius*, *Commentaire sur les Catégories*, p. 98, note 5). I am not the only one to have noted that Busse's edition is deficient, and should be redone from the ground up.

The parallel text from Olympiodorus is the following:

> Chapter four, in which we investigate what is the end of Aristotle's philosophy, and what is the usefulness that obviously emerges from it. The usefulness that obviously emerges from it is to know that the principle of all things is unique, infinite in power, unlimited, incorporeal, ungraspable, inciting the desire of all things [an allusion to Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* I, 1094a1] by nature, goodness-in-itself; indeed, 'good' is other than goodness, just as 'white' is other than whiteness. White is what receives the quality itself, while whiteness is the quality itself; likewise, what receives is good, but goodness is the transcendent reality (πρᾶγμα[239]) itself and the original reality (ὕπαρξις) itself and the essence of the good; and that 'it is not good for many to govern. Let there be a single leader, a single king', Aristotle himself, when doing theology, says so in his *Metaphysics*.[240] That the principle of all things is unique must be proved in the following way: all that is, is well governed, and rightly so: it is not possible for all that is to be badly governed, since God is up above (θεοῦ περιόντος). What is well governed has been set in order (τέτακται); that which has been set in order has been set in order by one alone (ὑφ' ἑνὸς τέτακται); all that is has therefore been set in order by one alone. We therefore call that which sets things in order 'principle of all things (πάντων ἀρχήν)', knowledge of which is the end of the philosophy of Aristotle.[241]

It is obvious that in the mind of a Neoplatonist, "the one principle of all things" can only be the One or the Ineffable. This is corroborated, moreover, by the specifically Neoplatonic epithets by which Ammonius and Olympiodorus characterize this first principle which, according to them, Aristotle also acknowledges: incorporeal, unlimited, goodness-in-itself, infinite in power, ungraspable, with the last epithet being applicable only to the One, or to that Iamblichan entity, higher than the One-all, that is the Ineffable. With regard to the latter, Damascius uses the epithet ἄληπτος instead of the ἀπερίληπτος[242] of Ammonius and Olympiodorus. The penultimate epithet: "of unlimited power", is, as far as I know, never associated with any entity other than the One or the Ineffable, or with the one situated immediately below: that is, with the

239 Cf. P. Hadot 1980, "Sur divers sens du mot *pragma* dans la tradition philosophique grecque".

240 See note 237, p. 130.

241 Olympiodorus, *Proleg.*, p. 9,14–30 Busse.

242 Damascius, *Treatise on the first principles*, vol. I, p. 7,20 edd. J. Combès–L.G. Westerink.

Dyad in Syrianus-Proclus,[243] or with the One-All before the alls in Damascius-Simplicius.[244] For, says Damascius,

> if one wishes, in whatever way, to name what is anonymous by nature [scil. the Ineffable], or to speak of what is absolutely unspeakable, or signify what is non-signifiable, nothing prevents us from referring even to the unique, ineffable principle the most nobles of names and concepts, like kinds of symbols among the most sacred ones, and from calling this principle one, according to the well-known common notion[245] according to which the principle of the all is one; however, from a more rigorous standpoint, it must be known that this name is not fitting for the ineffable …[246]

Damascius thus testifies to the custom, widespread among the Neoplatonists, of referring attributes of lower hypostases, for instance 'goodness-in-itself' or 'of unlimited power' to the principle of principles, the One or the Ineffable according to viewpoint,[247] especially in courses or commentaries addressed to beginners.

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243 Cf. A. Sheppard 1982, "Monad and dyad as cosmic principles in Syrianus", especially p. 4.

244 Cf. n. 247, p. 132.

245 The common notion (according to Damascius, *Treatise on the first principles*, vol. II, p. 21,15–20 J. Combès–L.G. Westerink) is the one expressed by Homer [*Iliad* II, 204] and "approved by Aristotle [*Metaph.* Λ, 1076a], which considers that government by many is not a good thing, and which establishes a single king over the universe, for it will be necessary according to this argument that the true one itself commands all things without exception …" The common notions, that is, notions that are accepted by everyone and considered to be innate, are generally criteria of truth in Stoic, Epicurean, and Platonic philosophy.

246 Damascius, *Treatise on the first principles*, vol. II, p. 23,7–15 J. Combès–L.G. Westerink, cited after the translation by J. Combès.

247 Because of the similarity in their description of the One, I propose to compare to the two quotations from Ammonius and Olympiodorus a text by Simplicius (*In Ench. Epict.* XXXVIII, 400–409 Hadot [Brill]), in which he describes the One before all things, the being situated, in the system of Damascius, immediately below the Ineffable and which is the highest ontological being mentioned in this commentary, as follows: "With regard to the One that is prior to the many, since it is the cause of the many, it has gathered the many within itself beforehand, according to a union that is unique, being All before the alls, henad of henads, cause of causes, principle of principles (ἀρχὴ ἀρχῶν: cf. the μία ἀρχή of the other texts), God of gods, as he is invoked by all in a manner that is fitting to nature [an allusion to the well-known common notion, cf. note 245 (p. 132)]. Yet he is also the goodness of goodnesses (ἀγαθότης ἀγαθοτήτων: cf. the αὐτοαγαθότης of the other

After the mention of the end of book Λ of the *Metaphysics*, which is common to Ammonius, Olympiodorus, Simplicius and David (Elias), and, as we saw above, to Syrianus,[248] David (Elias) is the only one to continue, taking in account some objections to the Neoplatonic interpretation of book Λ. To those who say that Aristotle had not spoken of a single principle, but of several, that is, of several different immobile movers of the spheres, David (Elias) objects[249] that Aristotle's numerous movers are ultimately attached to the first Intellect. To those who might ask why Aristotle said that the principle of the all is Intellect rather than the Good, like Plato, he replies that it is because in his *Metaphysics* Aristotle does theology right after his *Physics*, and the Intellect is a principle closer to nature, but that Aristotle also knows the Good as highest principle: does he not say in the prologue to the *Ethics* (to Nicomachus) that all things desire the Good? It should be known, he adds, that when he does theology, Aristotle does so while starting out from the principles of nature, and that Plato, on the contrary, when he discourses on nature, starts out from the principles of theology.[250] Simplicius uses an analogous comparison when, in the context of the sixth introductory point, he opposes the method proper to Aristotle to Plato's:[251]

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texts). Indeed, the first cause according to each property is desired by what comes after it; but the one that is desired by all (οὗ δὲ πάντα ἐφίεται = Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.*, 1,1094a1), is good. Thus, the principle of principles is the goodness of goodnesses; but likewise, he is also the power of powers (δύναμις δυνάμεων: cf. the ἀπειροδύναμος of the other texts). Indeed, each principle has the supreme power in the species that is proper to it, but the principle of principles possesses the supreme power above all principial powers (ἡ δὲ τῶν ἀρχῶν ἀρχὴ [ἔχει] τὴν ἀκροτάτην ὑπὲρ πάσας τὰς ἀρχικὰς δυνάμεις; cf. the ἀπειροδύναμος of the other texts)".

248 See above, note 85, p. 28, and for Themistius p. 91ff.

249 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, pp. 120,19–121,4 Busse.

250 Cf. David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 124,17–23 Busse: "His thought (*scil.* that of Aristotle) never leaves the domain of phenomena. This is why he always disconcerts and constrains his listeners (or readers) by basing himself on the evidence of phenomena. What he has demonstrated by argumentation he confirms by the testimony of the Ancients, saying that Heraclitus and Empedocles think the same thing. When he carries out research in the field of what is above nature, he takes his proofs from what belongs to the order of nature. That is why Aristotle, when he does theology, always remains a philosopher of nature, just as, conversely, Plato, when he does research in the philosophy of nature, always remains a theologian, making room in his arguments, without exception, for his doctrine of Ideas."

251 Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 6,27–30 Kalbfleisch, cited above, p. 84, in the translation by M. Chase 2003. Cf. Simplicius, *In Phys.*, p. 1249,12–17 Diels: "In the present case, as in most

> On all occasions, Aristotle refuses to depart from nature, but on the contrary he envisages even what transcends nature in its relations with nature, just as, conversely, the divine Plato, in conformity with the Pythagorean habit, examines even the things of nature insofar as they participate in those that transcend nature.

It goes without saying that for these very reasons the philosophy of Plato is considered to be higher, more theological, and more inspired as compared to that of Aristotle: this is a recurrent theme since Middle Platonism.[252] It is equally clear that the *Metaphysics* is held to contain only a beginning of the theology that had found its full flourishing with Plato, and I believe this viewpoint should be taken into account when studying Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Metaphysics*, such as those by Asclepius-Ammonius. Aristotle's *Metaphysics* can only be an intermediary stage between the study of principles and natural causes and the true theology developed by Plato in his *Parmenides*. Aristotle's thought is not "transcendent" enough by nature. Aristotle's inferiority is expressed even more clearly by Olympiodorus, Philoponus and Elias in texts we shall discuss later on.[253]

Yet the remarks by David (Elias) and by Simplicius on the difference between the methods of Plato and Aristotle also serve to support the thesis of a fundamental complementarity and agreement between the doctrines of these two philosophers: the difference in method can explain the occurrence of doctrinal differences, most of which are considered as merely apparent.

Simplicius' treatment of the fourth introductory point has only the mention of the end of book Λ of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* in common with that of Ammonius and Olympiodorus:

> The fourth point of those put forward was to discover the end (*telos*) of Aristotle's philosophy, for from the end, we shall clearly also discern the venerability (*to semnon*) of his philosophy. Now, the end of this man's

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cases, the difference between the two philosophers does not concern the thing itself, but its name. I think the reason often is that Aristotle tries to maintain the usual meaning of words, and to construct his argumentation on the basis of things that are obvious to sensation, whereas Plato, on the contrary, often disdains this kind of argumentation and calmly launches himself toward the contemplations situated on the level of the intelligibles (πρὸς τὰς νοητὰς θεωρίας)."

252 Cf. above, p. 52 f. Cf. pp. 143–146.

253 Aristotle's inferiority by no means implies Plato's infallibility: Cf. below, p. 145 f.

> philosophy, too, is, with regard to character, perfection by means of the virtues; with regard to knowledge, the ascent (*anadromê*) towards the one principle of all things. For Aristotle knew this Principle scientifically (*epistêmonikôs*), and he was awestruck (*esephthê*) and cried out with a clear voice, 'The rule of many is not good!' The end common to both is the most complete happiness which can befall mankind. When it came to describing this happiness, Aristotle did not yield to any of the most eminent philosophers; nor did he think it right that one who had risen (*anadramonta*) to such happiness should even be called a man, but a god. Such are Aristotle's lofty words in the last part of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[254]

The reason why Simplicius insists on the fact that Aristotle has come to know the principle of all things 'scientifically', is, in my opinion, to emphasize that he is not basing himself only on the common opinion expressed, for instance, by Homer, but that he has known this unique principle thanks to his philosophical reasoning elaborated in book Λ.[255] Let us recall that it was well before Ammonius, Simplicius, Olympiodorus and David (Elias) that Porphyry and Syrianus had considered that the doctrine of the οὐσίαι developed in this book presupposed the Neoplatonic One, and that this book had been commented upon, after Porphyry, by Iamblichus,[256] Themistius,[257] and Simplicius,[258] quite obviously still in the same spirit.

From the texts cited above, let us retain that the combination of the two quotations from Aristotle, the one from the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the one from the end of the *Metaphysics* Λ, serves our Neoplatonists as proof that Aristotle did indeed acknowledge the One-Good as first principle.

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254 Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 6,6–15 Kalbfleisch, cited in the translation by M. Chase 2003, p. 21, slightly modified. By distinguishing *telos* = *end* from *skopos* = goal, we replace his translation 'goal' for *telos* by 'end'.

255 'Scientifically' could, however, also mean that Aristotle knew the One only through philosophical reasoning, and not, in addition, in the intuitive way of the theurge: cf. I. Hadot 2002a, "Die Stellung des Neuplatonikers Simplikios zum Verhältnis der Philosophie zu Religion und Theurgie", and the chapters "Le rapport entre les cultes ancestraux, la théurgie et la philosophie chez Jamblique et Hiéroclès d'Alexandrie" and "Le rapport entre les cultes ancestraux, la théurgie et la philosophie chez Simplicius", in I. and P. Hadot 2004, *Apprendre à philosopher dans l'Antiquité*, pp. 187–207.

256 Cf. above, p. 65 (at the bottom) f. with n. 38.

257 Cf. above, pp. 91–97.

258 Cf. above, notes 37, p. 65 and 38, p. 66.

This also holds true for Syrianus, as we have seen, albeit with certain restrictions.[259] If there is no doubt that Ammonius, Olympiodorus, David (Elias) and Simplicius identified the end of Aristotle's philosophy with the Neoplatonic One, this does not seem to be the case with Philoponus. He is the only one to define the principle of all things as "the demiurgic principle who always remains in the same state",[260] and hence as the Intellect. He does likewise in the following chapter, the fifth, which deals with the means leading to this end. It is true that with regard to the fifth point, the other commentators do not speak *expressis verbis* about the One either, but it is at least clear, after what they have said on the subject of the fourth point, that for them the end of Aristotle's philosophy is the One. It might be that Philoponus, inspired by his adherence to Christianity, deliberately used a language that was Neoplatonic to be sure, but was compatible with his Christian beliefs, and that he therefore modified his notes from Ammonius' classes in this direction. He may also be implicitly denouncing the fundamental philosophical agreement between Plato and Aristotle which, as we have seen and shall see again, is presupposed by the other commentators.

9.4 *A Neoplatonic Exegetical Principle: Aristotle's Deliberate Obscurity (ἀσάφεια) in His Properly Philosophical Works*[261]

Another chapter of the introduction develops the reasons for the obscurity which Aristotle is said to use intentionally in a specific part of his work, a theme that is recurrent since Middle Platonism[262] and is closely linked to the preceding chapter, which deals more generally with the different styles of expression used by Aristotle in the various kinds of works defined in the classification of his works (= the second preliminary point). For the sake of brevity, I will summarize in this context only those expositions by Olympiodorus and by David (Elias)[263] which are the most complete, for they deal with all the stylistic genres belonging to the various categories contained in the classification of Aristotle's works, omitting only the hypomnematic works, which are precisely the

259 Cf. above, note 85, p. 28.

260 Philoponus, *In Cat.*, pp. 5,34–6,2 Busse.

261 Cf. above, p. 53 and p. 78, note 76. The texts are the following: Ammonius, *In Cat.*, p. 7,7–14 Busse; Philoponus, *In Cat.*, p. 6,22–28 Busse; Olympiodorus, *Proleg.*, pp. 11,21–12,17 Busse; David (Elias), *In Cat.*, pp. 124,25–127,2 Busse; Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 7,1–22 Kalbfleisch.

262 Cf. above, p. 53.

263 Olympiodore, *Proleg.*, p. 10,3 ff. Busse; David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 121,20 ff. Busse. For the details, cf. the scheme of the division of Aristotle's works in I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, p. 65 and pp. 108–122.

ones characterized, among other features, by the complete lack of stylistic concern. Thus, after having spoken of the letters which, as David (Elias) specifies once again, belong to the category of 'particular works',[264] and whose style both define as concise, in familiar language, and which is at the same time peculiar to him, they come to the 'intermediary works', and thus to the research based on observation (ἱστορίαι). These, according to David (Elias) contain on the one hand the political constitutions, and on the other, all the works of natural history. According to Olympiodorus, this kind of work is characterized by a clear, obvious style, which is opposed, according to David (Elias) to the obscure style of the 'acroamatic' works (= the works that are 'listened to', that is, studied), of philosophical import, which, for their part, correspond in the scheme of the division of Aristotle's works, to the 'works in which he speaks in his own name', that is, to all the works contained in the preparatory Aristotelian curriculum of the Neoplatonists,[265] except, however, for the treatises *Topics*, *Sophistici Elenchi* and *Meteorologica*. If Aristotle renounces obscurity in these three works, says Simplicius,[266] it is because he judged that the subject of these treatises, because of their more common character, did not need to be veiled. As we already mentioned above,[267] for our commentators the obscurity or clarity of a treatise is generally a sign, among other things, of its philosophical or non-philosophical nature.

From a text by Simplicius, we learn of the denomination of the group that is opposed to the acroamatic works:

> Aristotle's works are divided into two groups: that of the exoteric works, such as the research based on observation (τὰ ἱστορικά), the dialogues, and, in a word, the works that are not concerned with intense exactitude, and that of the acroamatic works, of which the present treatise (sc. the *Physics*) is a part. In the acroamatic works, he (= Aristotle) practices

264 The particular works (τὰ μερικά): one must understand an ontological meaning in this expression, in the sense of the opposition τὰ αἰσθητὰ καὶ μερικά—τὰ καθόλου καὶ διανοητικά: cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius—Commentaire sur les Catégories*, p. 67 ff.

265 Simplicius (*In Cat.*, p. 7,16–22 Kalbfleisch) gives examples for all the categories of works composed in a clear style: *Letters*, *Constitutions*, *Meteorologica*, *Topics*, without determining the genre of works to which they belong. David is the only one to specify them all: the particular works, the intermediary works, and among the general works, all the dialogues and three works from the *autoprosopa* or acroamatic works: the *Meteorologica*, the *Topics* and the *Sophistici Elenchi*.

266 Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 7,16–18 Kalbfleisch.

267 Cf. above, p. 78, n. 76.

> obscurity while rejecting, by its use, readers who are too superficial, so that these works seem to them not to have been redacted at all.[268]

The continuation of this text shows that Simplicius attributes the distinction between acroamatic and exoteric works to Aristotle himself, as had been done long before him in the period of Middle Platonism, by Aulus Gellius,[269] the disciple of the Platonist Taurus, and by Plutarch of Chaeronea.[270] All three refer to an apocryphal letter from Aristotle to Alexander, which they consider to be authentic.[271] In the fourth century, this distinction is attested in Themistius'[272] funeral speech for his father Eugenius,[273] and in his *Discourse* XXVI, except that he uses the expression 'from outside' (θυραῖοι) for the exoteric works, and tends to refer to the acroamatic works by circumlocutions,[274] out of respect for the rhetorical demands of a discourse that must avoid technical terms.

In the texts from Plutarch of Athens and Themistius, we have been able to note, as far as the acroamatic works are concerned, a vocabulary borrowed from the mysteries and the pagan cults: τὰ ἀπόρρητοι and ἐποπτικαὶ διδασκαλίαι (Plutarch, cf. note 270), the unveiling of statues (Themistius, cf. note 273), and the mystical works in which the perfect rites may be found (Themistius, cf. the end of note 76, p. 78). This usage is very widespread among the Neoplatonists.

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268 Simplicius, *In Phys*., p. 8,16–20 Diels.

269 Aulus Gellius, *Attic nights*, XX,5,6.

270 Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 7,5 and 9. Plutarch also gave to the acroamatic works the name 'epoptic' (pertaining to initiation), and he gives the *Metaphysics* as his only example.

271 This letter is cited almost identically by Aulus Gellius (op. cit.) and Simplicius (*In Phys*., p. 8,26–29): "Aristotle to king Alexander, Greetings! You wrote me on the subject of the acroamatic lessons, in the belief that they must be kept secret. Know, then, that they are both published and not published, for they are comprehensible only for those who have heard us. Be well!".

272 On Themistius as a Neoplatonic philosopher, cf. above, pp. 74–97.

273 Themistius (*Oratio* XX, 235a, cited in the translation by R.J. Penella 2000, slightly modified) praises his father Eugenius, among other things as an interpreter of Aristotle, as follows: "He [= Aristotle] renders thanks to you [= Eugenius] for having been his interpreter, a more lucid one than a Bacis or an Amphilytus was for Loxias [Apollo]. He is grateful to you for having explained the wisdom that he had discovered and cultivated but then concealed in darkness and wrapped in abstruseness (ἠμφίασεν ἀσαφείᾳ). His intention had not been to grudge good men this wisdom, but he did not want to cast it out onto the streets either. You would determine who were worthy of his wisdom. You would remove the darkness and uncover Aristotle's statues (ἀγάλματα)".

274 Themistius, *Oratio* XXVI, 319c, cited above, near the end of n. 76, p. 78.

Let us recall that Marinus, in his *Life of Proclus*, called the Aristotelian and Platonic cursus of Neoplatonic studies respectively 'the little mysteries' and 'the great mysteries'. I will only mention David (Elias)[275] once again, who, with regard to the fifth point of the first introductory scheme, compares the various stages that lead to the summit of Aristotle's philosophy to the rites of initiation into the mysteries: ethics corresponds to the ablutions and consecrations that purify the soul, while physics is paralleled to the first degree of initiation, the προτέλεια. For, says David (Elias),

> if in theology we carry out research into what is immobile, and in the philosophy of nature, on what is moved, the cause of motion is divine, and we shall arrive, starting out from moved things, at the notion of intelligible things. […] Aristotle's philosophy is thus in its entirety a holy place, and logic defends what is contemplated inside it like a wall.

Thus, the acroamatic treatises, like the works of Plato, were raised to the rank of revelations and holy scriptures, and their obscurity was compared by our Alexandrian commentators and Simplicius to symbols in general and to the Pythagorean symbols in particular, to the curtains or veils of temples, to the Oracles of Apollo, and to myths. Each of these comparisons served to illustrate and define the function of this obscurity: it serves to conceal a knowledge that must not be revealed to just anyone, but remains reserved for an elite. From this viewpoint, its role is first and foremost defensive, but it also has a pedagogical value, as Simplicius, Ammonius, Philoponus, and Olympiodorus explain. "Aristotle," says Ammonius, for instance,

> used obscurity as a veil for his philosophy, so that his virtuous (σπουδαῖοι) readers may be incited by this very obscurity to extend their souls with even more ardor, and that readers who are too light and frivolous, when they approach such treatises, may be chased away by their obscurity.

In any case, it should be emphasized that such explanations concerning the difficulty of Aristotle's treatises are not innocent. They establish as a principle that one must seek an unexpressed meaning behind the expressed meaning, a principle that greatly facilitates a Neoplatonic interpretation of Aristotle's works.

275 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 121,8–19 Busse.

9.5 *The Duty of the Exegete: To Bring to Light the Deep Agreement between the Philosophies of Aristotle and Plato*

One of the chapters of the first introductory scheme deals with the qualities required of the good exegete.[276] Since philosophy had become essentially the exegesis of the works of the great philosophers of the past—Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, Chrysippus—the role of the exegete had become crucial. This role was to gain even more importance among the Neoplatonists, since they considered, as we have seen, that they had to penetrate the meaning of works that had been made obscure, or even esoteric, by their author's will: by myths and allegories in Plato, and by obscurity of style in Aristotle. One of the qualities of the exegete demanded by Simplicius and David (Elias) is knowledge of all of Aristotle's works, not merely of the treatises included in the school curriculum:

> "He must know all of Aristotle's works", says David,[277] "so that, after having shown that Aristotle is always in agreement with himself, one can explain Aristotle's works by those works themselves".

If one isolates this phrase from its context, the method preached by David seems to be a model of objectivity. One might merely criticize the turn of phrase "showing that Aristotle is always in agreement with himself", for it implies that its author supposes that Aristotle's works form a perfectly coherent system. Yet this objectivity is only apparent, as is shown by the continuation of the text:

> He (*scil*. the Aristotelian exegete) must know all the works of Plato, so that he may demonstrate, by making the works of Aristotle an introduction to Plato's works, that the latter is always in agreement with himself.[278]

The main task of the Neoplatonic Alexandrian commentator therefore remains, contrary to what some historians of philosophy still think today, the explanation of Plato's philosophy, which was also understood as a coherent system. The exegesis of Aristotle, necessary as a preliminary to the understanding of Plato, must therefore be oriented toward this goal, which is scarcely possible unless one presupposes a rather broad doctrinal agreement between the two philosophers. Simplicius is the only one to formulate this presupposition

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276 Ammonius, *In Cat*., p. 8,11–19 Busse; Philoponus, *In Cat*., p. 6,30–35 Busse; Olympiodore, *Proleg*., p. 10,24–33 Busse; Simplicius, *In Cat*., p. 7,23–32 Kalbfleisch; David (Elias), *In Cat*., pp. 122,25–123,11 Busse.

277 David (Elias), *In Cat*., p. 123,7–9 Busse.

278 David (Elias), *In Cat*., p. 123,9–11 Busse.

explicitly in the context of the present chapter of the introductory scheme,[279] but it cannot be doubted that it was also accepted by the other Alexandrian commentators: we have already encountered it in the context of the first and the fourth chapter of the present introductory scheme. Olympiodorus, for his part, confirms this in his commentary on the *Gorgias*:

> As far as Aristotle is concerned, one must say that in the first place, he is never in disagreement with Plato, but only in appearance, and second, even admitting that he disagrees, he still owes it to Plato.[280]

Another quality required of the exegete, according to Olympiodorus and David (Elias), is that he must be capable both of explaining the text, particularly by elucidating obscure passages, and of judging scientifically, by distinguishing the true from the false, and sterile from fecund thoughts.[281] In order to so do, the exegete must be objective—a feature emphasized by all the commentators—and not wish to find difficulties where there are none, or, on the contrary wish to defend Aristotle at all costs where he cannot be defended, as if one had enrolled in the philosopher's school, or as if one were in the presence of an oracle. As Olympiodorus and David (Elias) declare,[282] one must not change attitudes as actors do when they interpret various characters and, as David (Elias) explains,[283] become Aristotelian while commenting on Aristotle, and Platonist while commenting on Plato, saying in the first case that there is no philosopher comparable to Aristotle, and in the second case that there is no philosopher like Plato. David means that one must not be either a Peripatetic in the manner of Alexander of Aphrodisias, nor a Platonist in the manner of some Platonists of the second century of our era, who opposed the tendency, then beginning to manifest itself among Platonists, to wish to explain the works of Plato with the help of the works of Aristotle. The exegete who has to deal at the same time with Aristotle and Plato—this Neoplatonic program of studies implies all by itself the idea of a certain harmony between these two philosophers—must avoid these extreme instances of taking sides, peculiar to those who comment exclusively on Plato or Aristotle, and adopt an attitude that seeks to reconcile Aristotelian and Platonic texts. This is what the apparent objectivity demanded

279 Simplicius, *In Cat.*, p. 7,29–32 Kalbfleisch.

280 Olympiodorus, *In Gorgiam*, 41,9 (p. 214,13–25 Westerink).

281 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 122,25–27 Busse; Olympiodorus, *Proleg.*, p. 10,25–27 Busse.

282 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 122,28–29 Busse; Olympiodorus, *Proleg.*, p. 10,30–31 Busse.

283 David (Elias), *In Cat.*, p. 122,29–32 Busse.

by all the commentators consists in, quite apart from the fact that the discussion of the ten points to be compulsorily dealt with at the beginning of the Aristotelian cycle, as well as the definition of the goal (*skopos*) of each of the treatises contained in that cycle, orient the student strongly and right from the outset.

Yet one must still come to an agreement about what one understands by 'objectivity'. In his article "Tradition et critique: lecture jumelée de Platon et Aristote chez Olympiodore",[284] to which I shall return below,[285] F. Renaud distinguishes between a 'demand for (hermeneutic) objectivity' and a 'demand for (philosophical) truth'. He writes as follows (p. 101): "This distinction appears to be crucially important. The demand for (philosophical) truth implies the concept of truth as agreement (or logical coherence) and universality. It is precisely because the task of explaining doxographical truth is, for the Neoplatonists, subordinate to the quest for philosophical truth, that the commentator has the right, and even the duty, to draw from elsewhere in the author's corpus, in Plato or Aristotle respectively, as well as in other schools (for instance, Stoicism). In other words, the commentator must strive to confront the teaching of Plato and of Aristotle with the truth. This reminds us of a simple but fundamental fact which it is easy to forget or to underestimate: for the Ancients, the commentary does not follow a historical method, but constitutes a way of doing philosophy, that is, of searching for the truth, even if this search does not set itself any other goal than the confirmation of the master's doctrine by the discovery of the truth."

The meaning I personally give to the notion of objectivity, in the precise context of the present paper, cannot be enclosed within the bipartition used by F. Renaud. I therefore specify that the objectivity of which I have spoken, and of which I believe the Neoplatonists are bereft, is historical, but I am of the opinion that Renaud's 'doxographical objectivity' cannot be achieved, even approximately, without the demand for historical truth, even if it is hard to achieve.[286] I agree completely with F. Renaud, when he notes that the Neoplatonists did not set themselves this kind of objectivity as their goal—this is proved, *inter alia*, by their introductions to the *Categories*. As far as the 'philosophical truth' *tout court* is concerned—and I must say that for me the meaning given to this notion by F. Renaud remains rather vague—one can say

284 F. Renaud 2008.

285 P. 145 with note 295.

286 Historical truth in the context of the interpretation of texts demands that one replace the text under study within its historical perspective, and refrain from committing anachronisms by giving the text a current meaning.

that it is demanded, and even to the greatest degree, by all the Neoplatonists we know of, without exception, and not merely by Olympiodorus, as F. Renaud seems to believe.

I wish to emphasize that the conception of the exegete's duties, which we have just described, is not peculiar to the last Neoplatonists. Let us recall that this is the same attitude that Themistius already attributed, some two hundred years previously, to his father Eugenius in his capacity as exegete of Aristotle and Plato, and Themistius no doubt laid claim to it as well. According to Themistius, his father did not change clothes as he moved from the Lyceum to the Academy, and he often first offered a sacrifice to Aristotle before finishing with a sacrifice to Plato.[287] This means that he did not teach Aristotle as a Peripatetic would have done, nor Plato as a pure Platonist would have done, but that he taught both philosophies while conceiving them to be complementary. Since the installation within the Neoplatonic cursus of an Aristotelian cursus as preparation for the Platonic cycle, that is, beginning with Porphyry, this kind of harmonizing attitude had become inevitable.

9.6 *Aristotle as a Philosopher Inferior to Plato*

I will conclude with texts that all belong to the introductions to commentaries on works by Aristotle, but, except in the case of Olympiodorus, to works other than commentaries on the *Categories*. In his commentary on the *Categories*, Olympiodorus had chosen to answer the question: "Is logic a part or an instrument of philosophy?" This question is discussed by Ammonius, Philoponus and Elias in the introductions to their commentaries on the *Prior Analytics*, whereas Olympiodorus intercalates it between the first and the second introductory scheme to the *Categories*.

From these rather lengthy texts on which I have commented elsewhere,[288] I will mention only the comparison established between Plato and Aristotle on the subject of the part each of the two had played in the development of logic. Olympiodorus argues as follows:[289] Plato made use of demonstration without having established its rules; Aristotle, on the contrary, discovered its rules, as it were, while separating them from the objects to which they apply. That is no reason, however, for granting higher esteem to Aristotle than to Plato: quite the contrary. Indeed, in order to carry out demonstrations, Plato had no need of Aristotle's apodeictic method; Aristotle, on the other hand, did require

287 Cf. above, p. 76 with note 72.

288 Cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius—Commentaire sur les Catégories*, pp. 161–168; cf. also pp. 183–188.

289 Olympiodore, *Proleg.*, pp. 17,37–18,12 Busse.

Platonic demonstration to establish his rules. Homer had no need of Aristotle's *Poetics*, nor did Demosthenes require the *Technique* of Hermogenes; quite the contrary, it was Aristotle and Hermogenes who needed the works of Homer and Demosthenes in order to conceive their methods. Elias says roughly the same thing:[290]

> The men of yesteryear were not unaware of what a demonstration is, nor did they commit logical mistakes in their demonstrations. Great natures who act by placing themselves above the rules themselves become rules for the people who come after them. Plato, says Themistius, when he carried out demonstrations, had no need of Aristotle's syllogistic to avoid making mistakes as far as the properties of the figures are concerned; in contrast, Aristotle needed the dialogues of Plato to collect the properties of the figures. In the same way, neither did Homer have need of Aristotle's *Poetics*, nor did Demosthenes need the *Rhetorical Technique* of Hermogenes, but on the contrary, Aristotle needed Homer in his *Poetics*, and Hermogenes needed Demosthenes in his *Rhetorical Technique*.

Philoponus' exposition[291] does not add anything new as compared to the passages cited, and he, like Elias, points to Themistius as the source of his comparison between Plato and Aristotle. These references to Themistius are important, for they prove the permanence of this kind of argumentation in the history of Neoplatonism.

Although these observations of Aristotle's inferiority, which I have just cited, refer exclusively to logic, we have already encountered an analogous judgment concerning other fields, in texts that compare the two philosophers' centers of interest:[292] In all his demonstrations, Aristotle starts out from the principles of nature, even when he ventures into the field of the theology, whereas Plato, even when he speaks of the things of nature, always remains a theologian. Aristotle is primarily a philosopher of nature, whereas Plato concerns himself essentially with theology, the highest part of philosophy. Moreover, the mere fact of conceiving of the Aristotelian cycle of the Neoplatonic cursus as a preparation for the Platonic cycle, a conception that was maintained from Por-

290 Elias, *In Analyt. pr.*, p. 69 (136), 23–32 Westerink 1961, "Elias on the Prior Analytics".

291 Philopon, *In Analyt. pr.*, p. 6,14–18, quoted above, note 84, p. 84.

292 Cf. above, p. 96, note 124 and p. 133 f. with notes 250 and 251, the quotations from David (Elias) and Simplicius. Cf. also below, p. 169 f., the quotation from Simplicius, *In De an.*, p. 246, 17 ff. Hayduck.

phyry on, by way of Themistius and his father,[293] and attested without exception down to the last Neoplatonists, implies this kind of verdict, at the same time as it presupposes the idea of a certain complementarity and harmony between the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato.[294] We have also seen that nothing distinguishes Simplicius, the representative of the School of Athens, from his Alexandrian colleagues with regard to their harmonizing expositions of the ten points to be dealt with as a preliminary to the study of the *Categories*.

To avoid misunderstandings, however, I hasten to add that the opinion of our Neoplatonists, according to which the philosophy of Aristotle is inferior to Plato's, does not, in their view, imply Plato's infallibility. Although I have never drawn the contrary conclusion anywhere in my writings, it has nevertheless been attributed to me, implicitly or directly.[295] A clarification is therefore necessary. According to what I have been able to observe, the affirmation of Aristotle's inferiority does not mean that Aristotle's work was without value—the existence of the Aristotelian cycle in Neoplatonic instruction proves the contrary—nor that Plato was infallible. The tendency toward the harmonization of the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, present in Neoplatonism with variable intensity from Porphyry to its end, had as its result, as we have often observed in the course of the present study, a certain Platonization of Aristotle's philosophy, which was counterpoised by a certain Aristotelianization of

293 Cf. above, p. 76 f. (Eugenius): Aristotelian studies conceived as rites preliminary to the Platonic Bacchic transports.

294 Cf. the article by Ph. Hoffmann 1998, "La fonction des prologues exégétiques dans la pensée pédagogique néoplatonicienne", who also emphasizes the propaedeutic character of the Aristotelian cycle.

295 Cf. for instance F. Renaud 2008, "Tradition et critique: lecture jumelée de Platon et Aristote chez Olympiodore", p. 98: "Hadot admits … that the thesis of harmony among the Neoplatonists undergoes nuances of meaning and degrees of adherence, but specifies that 'these were only nuances, and the principle itself of harmonization was never placed in doubt', any more than was the doctrine of Plato's infallibility". F. Renaud is referring here to p. 181 in I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, but only the quotation between single quotation marks is to be found there, and the rest is his own conclusion; yet the reader is led to believe that this is a textual quotation, followed by a quotation according to meaning. Cf. also C. Viano 2006, who, in her very important commentary on the *In Meteor*. of Olympiodorus, says at p. 76: "One must conclude that when commenting on the *Meteorologica*, Olympiodorus does not hesitate to acknowledge that on some points the contradiction between the two philosophers is truly insoluble. His objectivity is therefore not a disguised Platonism that always declares that Plato is right, as I. Hadot claims, but a genuine objectivity that intends, in the first place, to illuminate the Aristotelian text by situating itself on the same level of discourse as Aristotle".

Plato's thought. Yet sometimes, as C. Viano rightly notes in the text cited in note 295, "the contradiction between the two philosophers is truly insoluble". I add that in such cases, if we have to do with phenomena linked to the realm of generation and corruption, and therefore on the ontological scale of Nature, the balance generally shifts, albeit not systematically, in favor of Aristotle, the great philosopher of Nature according to the Neoplatonists; while if it is theological questions that are under discussion, generally, but not systematically, it shifts in favor of Plato, the leader in theology according to the same philosophers. The three texts from the *In Meteorol.* by Olympiodorus to which C. Viano refers at page 76 as illustrations of Olympiodorus' alleged objectivity, moreover, illustrate perfectly what I have just said. Sometimes, also, one reaches a *non liquet*. I shall choose only one example: Themistius. From this zealous representative of the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato, who was convinced that the study of the Aristotelian cycle was not an end in itself, but a preparation for learning the Platonic cycle[296]—which was therefore held to be on a higher level—we have cited, on the one hand, texts which attest that in his view, Aristotle had not invented anything as far as logic was concerned, but had derived everything from the works of Plato[297]—which implies a certain inferiority with regard to the latter. On the other hand, we reproduced a text of his in which he declares that Aristotle, just as much as Plato, may have said nonsense.[298] The example of Themistius thus shows clearly that Plato's alleged superiority did not imply his infallibility.

10 Did the Tendency of Ammonius' School to Harmonize the Philosophies of Aristotle and Plato Bear a Greater Resemblance to the Intense Tendency of Iamblichus, or to the Limited One of Syrianus-Proclus?

I believe that the existence of the harmonizing tendency in the commentators of the school of Ammonius,[299] as well as in Simplicius, already emerges sufficiently from their treatment of the ten points of the first introductory scheme to the *Categories*. That this tendency to harmonization shows itself in

296 Cf. above, pp. 75–88, especially p. 76. (Aristotle's philosophy as *proteleion* to Plato's) with note 72.

297 Cf. above, note 84, p. 84, and p. 144, the quotations from Philoponus and Elias concerning Themistius.

298 Cf. above, p. 85.

299 On the personality of Ammonius, cf. above, pp. 15–21.

all the works of the Neoplatonists teaching at Alexandria and having followed the teaching of Ammonius, directly or indirectly, has, moreover, almost never been doubted by historians of philosophy. The only notable variant has been the opinion of K. Verrycken (cf. above, p. 28), but I believe that the historical panorama provided by the present research has proved the contrary. The difference in opinions which I mentioned above (pp. 26–40) generally concerned only this school's doctrinal orientation, which many historians of philosophy, following K. Praechter, have thought was very different from that of Syrianus-Proclus. My own objections against Praechter's thesis can find a confirmation, *inter alia*, in the book by E. Tempelis entitled *The school of Ammonius, son of Hermeias, on knowledge of the divine*.[300] The author collects texts from the various members of the school of Ammonius on the themes indicated in his title, which represents a considerable and precious labor, demonstrating the doctrinal coherence of the school of Ammonius. However, he most often omits to replace them within their complete historical context—one must concede that this was not the goal of his research—and it is for this reason that only a sufficiently well-informed reader can realize that the views of the Neoplatonists very often remained basically identical from Porphyry to the end of that philosophy, for instance on the doctrine of universals and Ideas, and that with regard

300 E. Tempelis 1998. I take the liberty of pointing out here only one of the little mistakes made by E. Tempelis, which concerns an alleged critique by Ammonius concerning myths, because those historians of philosophy who see in Ammonius an extreme rationalist (see above, p. 30 [14]—34 [16]), might find a confirmation in it. At page 101 of his book, E. Tempelis gives the following sentences as the opinion of Ammonius: "Myths do not give any proof for what they mean and often lead to a confusion as to the causes of all entities, eternal and perishable (Asclepius, *In Metaph.*, 196,31–197,2). The only positive attitude to myths among Ammonius' students is that of Olympiodorus (*In Gorg.*, 237,7–13), according to whom myths lead us from the phenomena to those things which are not manifest in our search of truth." Yet in the text to which E. Tempelis refers, Asclepius is summarizing Aristotle's critique with regard to the myths of Hesiod and the Theologians (Aristotle, *Metaph.* B,1000a18–25), not his own, nor that of Ammonius. As Asclepius has said himself (p. 196,17–25), he has defended Hesiod's myths a bit earlier, in the θεωρία (pp. 195,25–196,10), and the theological explanation he gives there of the mythical food of the gods, ambrosia and nectar, is in complete conformity with the generally positive attitude of all the Neoplatonists toward myths. We have seen above, moreover (p. 53, and pp. 136–139), that the obscurity of Aristotle's acroamatic works had been placed in parallel by all the Alexandrian commentators on the *Categories*, as well as by Simplicius, and not only by Olympiodorus, with the Pythagorean symbols, the curtains or veils of temples, the Oracles of Apollo, and myths.

to this, differences of opinion concern primarily the questions of whether or not Aristotle agrees with Plato on some special points. It is the great merit of L. Cardullo to have demonstrated definitively,[301] in my opinion, that the philosophy of Ammonius-Asclepius is not situated at a pre-Plotinian stage, made no concessions to Christianity—as was claimed by K. Praechter and those who adhere to his hypotheses—nor did it stop at the hypostasis of the Aristotelian Intellect. L. Cardullo concludes:[302] "Rather than in the presence of an Aristotelianized Platonism—as some have maintained—we find ourselves before a strongly Neoplatonized Aristotle, read and interpreted through the grill of the so-called Athenian henology, because ultimately I believe that at Alexandria, too, at least down to Ammonius, the Neoplatonic masters never ceased teaching the unity, transcendence, and supra-essentiality of the absolutely first Principle of all reality".

Let us now return to our central subject: the history of the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato. The article by D.P. Taormina, "Dynamique de l'écriture et processus cognitif dans le néoplatonisme", already cited several times earlier,[303] allows us to follow the variants of this tendency by means of the various interpretations of Aristotle, *De anima*, III,4,429b30, going from Iamblichus to Simplicius. Aristotle's text reads as follows:

> Intellect is in a sense potentially the intelligibles, though in entelechy it is nothing until it has thought; it must be like a a writing-tablet on which nothing is written in actuality: this is exactly what happens with intellect.

The passages I have taken up and will take up in this context are, for the most part, taken from the article by D.P. Taormina which I have just cited.

We have seen above (p. 70f.), how Iamblichus, according to Stephanus of Alexandria (?), interpreted this metaphor of the ancient writing tablet by forcing Aristotle's statement: the unwritten tablet becomes a tablet written in invisible characters. Iamblichus identified it with the soul of a child, who cannot yet reason, even though he possesses all the formal reasons. For him, Aristotle is in full agreement with Plato in admitting that "the intelligibles are present in the soul, as are the reasons of all things, and there is not knowledge but reminiscence".

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301 Cf. L. Cardullo 2002; L. Cardullo 2009 and L. Cardullo. 2012

302 L. Cardullo 2009, "Una lettura neoplatonica di Metaphysica Alpha: Gli scolii di Asclepio di Tralle …", p. 269ff.

303 Cf. above, p. 70 with n. 49 and pp. 100–102.

As far as Plutarch of Athens is concerned, another text by Stephanus of Alexandria (?), which we cited above (p. 101), proves that Plutarch, who also observes complete agreement between Aristotle and Plato, sides with the interpretation of Iamblichus. Yet this same text also shows that Ammonius, who returned to a textual reading of Aristotle's metaphor, observes their disagreement.

However, one may doubt the permanence of this disagreement on Ammonius' part when one reads a text by Philoponus that comments on Aristotle's metaphor. In his *De intellectu*, which consists in a commentary on the chapter concerning the intellect in Book III of Aristotle's *De anima*, Philoponus first makes the same observation of discord that Ammonius had noted, but subsequently questions it. I quote the text in the English translation by W. Charlton of Moerbeke's Latin translation (the Greek original is lost):[304]

> We should notice here that in likening the rational soul to an uninscribed thing you write on, Aristotle places the forms of intelligible things in the soul according to the first sort of potentiality—I mean by virtue of a suitability [*idoneitas*] [to receive them]—not, as Plato does, by way of disposition [*hexis*]. That being so, he does not, like Plato, think the soul pre-exists [birth], for if it is pre-existent it should possess accounts dispositionally. But if it is not pre-existent, it must have had a beginning to its existence. If it began to be, it is wholly necessary on the same account that it should have a limit. For everything which has a beginning in time has a limit in time. So from these premises the soul is shown to be mortal …
>
> But to this it may be replied that we ought to interpret what Aristotle says here carefully and thoughtfully with regard to his whole thought and to what he says everywhere about the intellect. If we have shown a thousand times over, quoting Aristotelian texts, that he wants the rational soul to be separate and immortal, it is plain that even if he here likens it to an uninscribed thing we write on he does not mean that it has forms in potentiality [*potentia*] in the first sense (the sense in which semen is

304 Philoponus, *De intellectu*, cited in the translation by W. Charlton 1991, *On Aristotle on the Intellect*, p. 57 ff. It is generally thought that the Greek text of the *De intellectu* had been a part of the authentic third book of Philoponus' commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, which book had been replaced, for mysterious reasons, by the commentary on the third book by Stephanus of Alexandria. In the title preceding the first book of his commentary, Philoponus remarks explicitly that these are his notes resulting from his frequentation of his teacher Ammonius, with some of his own observations.

> a man in potentiality). But a certain latitude must be recognized in both meanings of 'potentiality'. For we say that prime matter is in potentiality a man, and also the elements and semen and all the things which are in potentiality in the first sense, that is, by virtue of suitability (*idoneitas* = ἐπιτηδειότης); but they are not in potentiality in the same way but some are closer to the thing and some more remote. A similar latitude, then, must be recognized in connection with potentiality in the second sense, i.e. by way of disposition (*hexis*). Both the sleeping geometer and the one who is awake are said to be [one who knows] in potentiality, but the waking geometer is closer to the actuality (*actus*); and the geometer who is asleep or drunk because he is held down by sleep or intoxication, resembles the man who does not have the disposition (*hexis*) at all. So in the same way even if he says the soul resembles an uninscribed thing you write on, he calls it this because of the holding down of cognition by the passions which makes it seem as if it did not have forms at all.

Philoponus thus makes a distinction between a textual interpretation, 'at first glance', which corresponds to the one transmitted as belonging to Ammonius by Stephanus as well as to that of Proclus,[305] and an interpretation corrected after taking all of Aristotle's works into account, an interpretation which comes near to that of Themistius and of Plutarch. We have seen above (p. 140) that one of the duties demanded of the good exegete by all the commentators belonging to the school of Ammonius in their ten-point introductions to the *Categories* consisted precisely in the knowledge of Aristotle's complete works. If we suppose that Philoponus is reporting the classes of Ammonius (cf. the title, note 304, p. 149), we can therefore wonder whether the latter had not modified his interpretation of Aristotle's metaphor in the course of his teaching.

We find indubitable statements of the disagreement between Aristotle and Plato in two passages from Proclus: one from his commentary on the *Cratylus*, and the other from his commentary on the first book of Euclid's *Elements*:[306]

> Indeed, the soul does not resemble an unwritten tablet, and it does not possess things potentially; on the contrary, it has them in act, but as if buried.

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305 See the following pages.

306 Proclus, *In Crat. sch.* 61, p. 26,26–27 Pasquali, and *In Eucl.*, 16,8, cited after the translation by D.P. Taormina 1993 "Dynamique de l'écriture et processus cognitif dans le néoplatonisme", p. 241 and 242 f.

> The soul would thus not be a tablet empty of writings, but always written, whether it writes itself or is written by the intellect.

An identical interpretation of Aristotle's metaphor, emphasizing the divergences between the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle, is found again in two places in Proclus' commentary on the *First Alcibiades*.[307] We shall see later on (p. 159 ff.) that Damascius and his school essentially return to the interpretation of Iamblichus, Themistius and Plutarch. Let us emphasize once again that the differences in the interpretations of Aristotle's text do not concern the Platonic doctrine itself of reminiscence, perception and the cognitive process, which remained essentially identical from Porphyry to Simplicius, and which I have described in detail elsewhere,[308] but merely the question of whether or not there is agreement between Plato and Aristotle on this point.

I do not know whether Syrianus-Proclus thought it possible to harmonize the views of Plato and Aristotle on the soul's automotricity. As far as Ammonius is concerned, a passage from Book I of the same commentary by Philoponus on Aristotle's *De anima* testifies to his conciliatory tendency concerning this subject, a tendency of which we have seen an example in Themistius. Here is the text in question:[309]

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307 Proclus, *In Alc.*, 277,20–22, vol. II, p. 318 Segonds: "For it is not like an *unwritten tablet* that receives reasons [λόγους] from outside", and 280,25–281,16, vol. II, p. 321 Segonds: "For the fact that those who answer say all that they say while drawing it from themselves is a strong proof in favor of the dogma that souls bring to light reasons [λόγους] from their own depths, that they needed only an awakener, and that they are not *unwritten tablets* that receive their imprints from outside". As D.P. Taormina 1993 remarks (p. 241), these three passages constitute "the nucleus of the cognitive theory elaborated by Proclus", and she observes that "the term λόγος shows all the ambiguity, but also all the theoretical fruitfulness already pointed out with regard to Iamblichus". I would add that it is this same rich meaning that the term 'logos' already assumes in Plotinus. I refer the reader to the explanation P. Hadot gives of it in his commentary on Plotinus' *Treatise* 38 (Enn. VI,7) (P. Hadot 1988, *Plotin, Traité 38*, p. 214 ff.).

308 I. Hadot 1997, "Aspects de la théorie de la perception chez les néoplatoniciens: sensation (αἴσθησις), sensation commune (κοινὴ αἴσθησις), sensibles communs (κοινὰ αἰσθητά) et conscience de soi (συναίσθησις)". Cf. also Ph. Hoffmann 1992–1993, the summary of his lectures in the *Annuaire* of the École Pratique des Hautes Études, and M. Chase 2010, "Porphyry on the cognitive process".

309 Philoponus, *In De anima*, pp. 94,36–95,26 Hayduck, cited in the translation by Ph. Van der Eijk 2006, p. 12.

Besides, ⟨Aristote⟩ himself says that in those things in which there is ⟨a difference between⟩ earlier and later, in these there is on any account also time (for earlier and later arise from time, in those things to which they extend); now where there is time, there is on any account also movement; for they presuppose each other, and where there is movement, there is on any account also time, and conversely where there is time, there is on any account also movement. Now in the soul there is ⟨a difference between⟩ earlier and later; hence there is also movement in it. That there is ⟨a difference between⟩ earlier and later in the soul is evident: for it proceeds from premises to conclusions and it does not know all things simultaneously but one thing before the other, nor does it grasp all things it knows at the same time, but the one thing before the other, and in general it proceeds from virtue to vice and from ignorance to knowledge.

These are the things that serve to show that even according to Aristotle himself the soul is subject to movement and that Plato was not wrong in assigning self-movement to it. And for an intelligent arbitrator (εὐγνώμονι διαιτητῇ) of these arguments no contradiction will be found to inhere in these, except in the words alone. As ⟨Aristotle⟩ is used to do in many places when he is refuting the apparent ⟨meaning⟩, he does so here, too. Since the real movements, which we have recognized, too, are only the natural ones and since the soul is not subject to any of these ⟨types of⟩ movement (for the soul does not grow or get smaller or change quality or place), therefore, lest anyone would think that since Plato says that the soul is always in motion, he means that it is subject to any of the natural ⟨types of⟩ movement we recognize, he himself [*scil.* Aristotle] demonstrates that it is wholly unmoved in respect of any of these movements. And this account is true, and it is the opinion of Plato, since Plato, too, thinks it is incorporeal, but according to Plato it can be subject to certain other types of movement, the intellectual and in particular the vital ones, in respect of which, Plato says [*Phaedr.* 245c5], it is most of all always in motion; for it constantly causes life, even when the organism is in a state of sleep and sleeping, when it does not activate its intellectual powers. Now since Plato says that all actuality without further qualification is movement, whereas Aristotle says that only the natural movements are such, it seems that the account is right that says that according to Plato ⟨the soul⟩ is subject to movement whereas according to Aristotle it is not subject to movement, but the disagreement is found to lie only in the verbal formulation.

It is a fact that Ammonius does not always side with Syrianus-Proclus, when the latter deny the harmony between the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. The very important study by A. Madigan (1986), entitled "Syrianus and Asclepius on Forms and Intermediates in Plato and Aristotle", provides a series of very significant examples, to which I refer the reader. I will merely add one example, albeit an important one. We have seen above (n. 85, p. 28) that Syrianus said that Aristotle, unlike Plato, was not aware of a first efficient cause, but merely of a final cause. Proclus was of the same opinion.[310] But L. Cardullo,[311] in addition to a passage from the dialogue *Ammonius* by Zacharias the Scholastic,[312] cites two extracts from Simplicius' commentaries on Aristotle's *Physics* and *De Caelo*, in which Simplicius affirms that Ammonius, his teacher at Alexandria, had written an entire book to prove that Aristotle too was of the opinion that the god of the universe was at the same time a final and a productive cause.[313] Contrary to the view of K. Verrycken, and, among historians of Arabic philosophy, Muhsin Mahdi, this view of things was not a novelty in the history of Neoplatonism,[314] but goes back, as we have seen, at least to Themistius and Hierocles, and quite probably well beyond, to Iamblichus and Porphyry. Asclepius' commentary "according to the oral classes of Ammonius" on books A–Z of the *Metaphysics* shows that Ammonius and Asclepius admitted, more often than Syrianus-Proclus, an agreement between the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. Between the very strong harmonizing tendency of Iamblichus, of Plutarch-Hierocles, and later of the school of Isidorus-Damascius on the one hand, and the much more restrained tendency of Syrianus-Proclus on the other, Ammonius and his school, including David and Elias, are probably situated somewhere in the middle.[315] The same state of affairs emerges *inter alia* from the development of the doctrine of the possible alteration of the essence of the rational human soul, which C. Steel 1978

310 Proclus, *In Tim.*, I, 266,21–268,24.

311 L. Cardullo 2011, "Creazionismo, eternalismo e causalità …", p. 41 f.

312 Zacharias Scholasticus, *Ammonius*, 522–528.

313 Simplicius, *In Phys.*, p. 1363,8–12 Diels and *In De cael.*, p. 271,19–20 Heiberg.

314 K. Verrycken 1990b, "The development of Philoponus' thought and its chronology", p. 236: "Typical of the Alexandrian form of Neoplatonism (Ammonius, Asclepius, Philoponus) is the thesis that Aristotle's God is the cause, both final and efficient, of the existence of the universe." Cf. Muhsin Mahdi 1967, whose entire article is based on this misunderstanding.

315 Above, p. 69 f., the quotations from Philoponus and David (Elias) testify to the fact that they criticize Iamblichus' propensity to place Aristotle and Plato in agreement, which is sometimes too strong in their opinion. Very instructive concerning the relation between Proclus and Ammonius is the article by A. Sheppard 1987, "Proclus' philosophical method of exegesis: The use of Aristotle and the Stoics in the commentary on the *Cratylus*".

attributes exclusively to Iamblichus and Damascius and his school, in opposition to Syrianus-Proclus, who reject it. Yet he has failed to notice that the same doctrine is found in Augustine, who bases himself on Porphyry, in Hierocles, as well as in Ammonius-Philoponus.[316]

With regard to other questions that scholars have raised about the school of Ammonius, I refer to what was said above at pages 13–22 and 26–40.

A few more comments on the ample use Asclepius makes of the work of the Peripatetic Alexander of Aphrodisias. I first reproduce the opinion of A. Madigan in the article I have just cited, p. 170: "It has long been known that Asclepius is heavily dependent of Alexander for his interpretation of Aristotle (cf. M. Hayduck, *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, VII.ii). Hayduck, who edited Asclepius for the *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, explained this dependence by the supposition that Asclepius's training under Ammonius the son of Hermeias—whom Hayduck took to be more interested in refuting Aristotle than in understanding him—and his own want of natural talent left him unprepared to deal with the Aristotelian text on his own (cf. Hayduck, p. v). But it is not at all clear why someone formed in an anti-Aristotelian milieu should draw so heavily on Peripatetic authority. For that matter, the supposition that Ammonius was an anti-Aristotelian would seem to rest on evidence from Asclepius, if on anything, and the present study has suggested that Asclepius is, if anything, bending over backwards to harmonize Plato and Aristotle. Indeed, Praechter seems more correct in counting these Alexandrians among the radical harmonizers, in contrast to the more reserved approach of the Athenians Syrianus and Proclus (cf. Praechter, 'Syrianus', cols. 1771–1772). I would suggest, however, that Asclepius's use of Alexander may well proceed from another motive: a serious desire to understand Aristotle on his own terms".

For my part, I would add that already Plotinus, right at the beginning of Neoplatonism, had the treatises of Aristotle himself read in his school together with the commentaries of the Peripatetics Aspasius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Adrastus (cf. Porphyry, *Vita Plotini*, §14). As soon as Aristotle's philosophy was lastingly recognized as being complementary to that of Plato—that is, beginning with Porphyry—recourse to the commentaries of Alexander must have remained constant in Neoplatonic instruction. Several times in the course of this study (note 26, p. 61: Porphyry; page 99f. with note 132: Hierocles;

316 Cf. I. Hadot 1996, pp. 100–107 and I. Hadot 2014, p. 194f.

pages 108–110: Syrianus), I have been led to mention the influence of Alexander of Aphrodisias. On the other hand, one must bear in mind the fact that a Neoplatonic commentary is never the entirely original work of an individual, but is based, to a very large extent, on the work of his predecessors. It is for this reason that the use of the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, both in general and in many details, was transmitted from generation to generation, and that Asclepius, while commenting on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and following, as he himself says, the course of his teacher Ammonius, was certainly not the first to cite Alexander in this context. What we do not know is whether he cites him more or less frequently than his predecessors (for example Ammonius).[317] Similarly, when, in his commentary on the *Categories*, Simplicius cites and interprets the treatise *On the All* by the Pseudo-Archytas, we cannot know whether or not he adds something to the interpretation of the same treatise by Iamblichus when he does not indicate it himself. Iamblichus was the first to use this treatise to interpret the *Categories*, thinking that it was the model of Aristotle's *Categories*. As Simplicius said (cf. the quotation above, p. 67 f.), that he himself had followed Iamblichus "step by step", "often using that philosopher's very words", it is most of the time impossible to distinguish the two authors.

I think it will be useful in this context to say a few words on the manner of composing commentaries in Antiquity. The Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* have been handed down to us in sufficient numbers so that we can reach rather significant conclusions by comparing them paragraph by paragraph. The commentaries in question are those of Porphyry, Iamblichus, Dexippus, Boethius, Ammonius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus (the last two of whom were auditors of Ammonius), David (Elias),[318] the student of Olympiodorus, and Simplicius, who, at the time he wrote his commentary on the *Categories* (after 538), had long been the student of Damascius.

317 H. Baltussen 2008, *Philosophy and exegesis in Simplicius*, devoted an entire chapter of his book (pp. 107–135) to the use Simplicius makes of the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, including a brief survey of the history of this use. Likewise Ph. Soulier 2010, *De l'illimité à l'infini*, on the occasion of a very in-depth interpretation of chapters 4–8 of book III of Aristotle's *Physics*, has summarized the characteristic features of Simplicius' use of Alexander at pp. 407 to 412.

318 Cf. above, note 151, p. 52.

11 The Compositional Procedure of the Neoplatonic Commentaries

The few quotations and summaries I have been able to make of the expositions of our five commentators on the first introductory scheme—the one in ten points, which provided an introduction to the philosophy of Aristotle—have already allowed us to glimpse that all these commentators relied on a common school tradition, which I analyzed in the first fascicule of *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*,[319] while providing lists of the commonly used citations and parallel texts. The subsequent research of C. Luna[320] has demonstrated that this result is also valid for the rest, and for all the Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories*, not only for the treatment of the ten questions to be dealt with beforehand, which go back only as far as Proclus. For instance, she describes as follows (page 301), with regard to the first two chapters of Simplicius' commentary, the structure of the exegetical tradition, which will also remain identical for chapters three and four:

"All the commentators refer to a very unitary tradition, for they approach the same themes and all discuss the same questions. On particular points, however, which generally do not concern the interpretation properly so called of the Aristotelian text, all of the commentators are divided into two families: on the one hand, the family which one might call 'Porphyrian', because it is characterized by the direct use of the commentaries of Porphyry, constituted by Porphyry himself, Dexippus, Boethius and Simplicius; and on the other, the Alexandrian family, made up by Ammonius, Philoponus, Olympiodorus and David (Elias)."

How can this highly unified tradition that links these two families, a tradition that includes harmonization, be explained? At the beginning of his commentary on the *Categories* (p. 1, 10 ff.) and in the text cited above at p. 67 f., Simplicius

319 I. Hadot *et alii* 1990.

320 C. Luna *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, fasc. III. C. Luna *et alii* 2001. *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les* Catégories *d'Aristote* (chap. 2–4). C. Luna, Ph. Hoffmann, P. Hadot and I had undertaken, in the context of the Paris CNRS, a detailed, paragraph by paragraph comparison of Simplicius' commentary with all the other commentaries on the *Categories* that have come down to us. This procedure was the only one apt to provide, in the first instance, a better understanding of Simplicius' commentary itself, and, second, to define the interdependence of all the commentaries, and thus, finally, to develop an important chapter of the history of Neoplatonic exegesis. Of the eleven fascicles planned for this project, only two were published by Brill in 1990; fascicle IV, already ready around 2003 and originally destined to be published once again by Brill, finally appeared with the Éditions *Les Belles Lettres* in 2001, since Brill had lost interest in this kind of research, to which we therefore had to put an end.

allows us to understand it. At the beginning of this unified tradition are two commentaries by Porphyry on the *Categories*: *By questions and answers*, and *To Gedalios* [which is lost] in seven books. The latter contained solutions to all the objections raised by the preceding Platonic, Peripatetic and Stoic commentators, thus providing a precious overview of all this previous literature. Iamblichus, in his own (lost) commentary on the *Categories*, followed, with additions on his part, "Porphyry to the letter on most (τὰ … πολλά)[321] of the questions". Above all, he inserted a new element in his commentary: parts of the text of the book *On the All* by ⟨Pseudo-⟩ Archytas, echoes of which are still to be found in the sixth-century commentaries. Simplicius, who himself was still able to read Porphyry's two commentaries on the *Categories* (the major one at least through the commentary of Iamblichus) as well as some of the ancient commentaries mentioned by Porphyry in his commentary to Gedalius, takes Iamblichus' commentary as his model, "following him step by step and often using that philosopher's very text", a text, then, which to a large extent already echoed Porphyry's commentary. At the same time, Simplicius attempts to reduce to greater concision "the abundant mass of these commentaries of all kinds—without, however, doing like the very great philosopher Syrianus, who reduces it to a minimum—, but without omitting anything of what is necessary, insofar as is possible". Simplicius' commentary, which is of considerable length (its modern edition covers 438 pages), but was nevertheless shorter than that of Iamblichus, is therefore a mixture of Porphyrian and Iamblichan elements, enriched with his own readings, whereas the (lost) commentary of Syrianus had reduced the entire mass of information contained in the commentaries of Porphyry and Iamblichus, or perhaps only in Iamblichus' commentary, to a minimum that was scarcely sufficient in Simplicius' view. It was this commentary by Syrianus which, *via* his student Proclus and the latter's student Ammonius,[322] must have been the basis of the scholarly tradition that C. Luna calls 'the Alexandrian family'. All the commentaries of this family are much shorter than the one by Simplicius, which cannot be explained merely by the fact that they are, in part, commentaries ἀπὸ φωνῆς. The 'Porphyrian family', in contrast, includes the Latin philosopher and politician Boethius (who, according to the research of C. Luna, used Porphyry alone and exclusively, and above all his commentary *By questions and answers*), as well as Dexippus,

321 And not 'sometimes', as C. Luna says (p. 328).

322 At the beginning of his commentary on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*, the only commentary we possess which he wrote himself, Ammonius refers expressly, for instance, to the teaching he has received from Proclus on this subject: *In De interpr.*, p. 1,6–11 Busse.

a student of Iamblichus, and Simplicius; the last two had still direct recourse to the commentary of Iamblichus and to the minor commentary of Porphyry, but to Porphyry's major commentary perhaps only through the intermediary of Iamblichus. In contrast, the 'Alexandrian family' no longer makes direct use of the commentaries of Porphyry and Iamblichus. All the Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories* that have come down to us, except for the one by Boethius,[323] thus depend, directly or indirectly, on the commentaries of Porphyry *and* of Iamblichus, although of course each commentator added or omitted details as he pleased, and adjusted his comments to the precise abilities of his audience at the time. The many parallel texts or identical citations that result from such a process can therefore never be taken into consideration in discussions on the attribution of a commentary to an author other than the one designated by the manuscripts.

One may suppose that in the case of Aristotle's other treatises, as well as of the dialogues of Plato, the mechanism by which Neoplatonic commentaries were fashioned was no different from the one we have identified for the commentaries on the *Categories*: each commentator used the works of his predecessors, whether written or oral, who had already proceeded in the same way. No ancient commentary is an original work, but all are based on a long scholastic tradition—the commentaries of the Peripatetic Alexander of Aphrodisias are a constant element in it—to which each author adds his personal touch. And although, judging by the commentaries on the *Categories*, the interpretations of Aristotle's logical works must not have changed noticeably, with regard to their doctrinal content, throughout the history of Neoplatonism, the same did not necessarily hold true of the commentaries on more theological themes, as for instance the *Metaphysics*, in which Aristotle openly attacked Plato and the Pythagoreans. In these cases, the tendencies of the various commentators to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were, as we have seen, more or less pronounced, without, however, ever ceasing to exist.

It ought not to be forgotten, in addition, that the entire preparatory Aristotelian cursus, like the Platonic cursus, was usually explained several times in the course of the teaching of professors of Neoplatonic philosophy. Damascius' *Life of Isidore* contains the following fine anecdote concerning the Neoplatonist Hierocles,[324] whose incredible eloquence Damascius praises:

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323 With regard to Boethius, one should also read the complementary article of St. Ebbesen 1990, "Boethius as an Aristotelian commentator".

324 Damascius, *The Philosophical History* (= *Vita Isidori*), frgm. 45 A Athanassiadi. On Hierocles, see above, pp. 1–3 and 97–100.

> On one occasion he (*scil.* Hierocles) was expounding to his students Plato's *Gorgias*, and one of his pupils—Theosebius—wrote down his commentary. As was naturel (οἷα εἰκός), some time later Hierocles again gave a class on the *Gorgias*; the same pupil took down the commentary and comparing his previous notes with the ones taken later he found almost nothing the same, though both versions—extraordinary though this may sound—reproduced Plato's meaning to the extent that this is possible. This indicates how broad was the ocean of his mind.

According to Damascius, then, the meaning of the dialogue *Gorgias* was very well rendered in these two series of courses. The doctrinal content must consequently have been the same each time, but thanks to Hierocles' exceptional rhetorical gifts and the extent of his general culture, his way of expounding it was very different in both cases. That means that one did not find, in the two versions of the interpretation of the *Gorgias* by the same author Hierocles, that mass of textual parallels, citations, and identical examples that was customary in Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories*, although they were composed by different authors. What interests us in our context, however, is that this anecdote *proves* the fact—already highly probable without it—that each Neoplatonic teacher must have interpreted the same works by Aristotle and Plato several times in the course of his professional life. If his career was long, it may well have happened that the same philosopher changed his mind, for instance on the place where a specific question was to be dealt with,[325] and that references to classes turn out not to be exact, because the commentaries or student's notes we have available do not always refer to the same series of classes.[326] One should therefore not change the attribution of a commentary to a specific author against the testimony of the manuscripts by basing oneself on such criteria.

12 The Harmonizing Tendency in Damascius and His Students Simplicius and Priscianus of Lydia

I have already cited[327] above a text by Simplicius in which he said that, contrary to the practice of all the other Neoplatonic philosophers after Proclus, Ascle-

325 For instance, the question of whether logic is an instrument or a part of philosophy; cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, pp. 160–168.

326 For specific examples, cf. I. Hadot *et alii* 1990, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur les Catégories*, pp. 166–168.

327 Cf. note 223, p. 126 f.

piodotus and Damascius did not follow all the doctrines of Proclus, and that Damascius, "owing to his sympathy for Iamblichus, was not afraid to reconsider many of Proclus' dogmas". Let us recall that Damascius was strongly influenced by his Alexandrian teacher Isidore, by whom he was introduced to dialectic, the highest part of Platonic philosophy.[328] To mention only a single doctrinal difference here, Damascius, following Iamblichus, recognized yet another entity above the One, which was the highest ontological entity for Syrianus-Proclus: the Ineffable. This return to Iamblichus was followed by at least two of Damascius' students: Simplicius and Priscianus of Lydia, who figured among the teachers and students of the School of Athens, and who accompanied Damascius to Persia.[329] All the known commentaries by Simplicius were written after his stay in Persia,[330] hence after 532. The commentaries on the *Manual* of Epictetus and on the *De anima* cannot be situated more precisely, whereas the other three commentaries can be dated even more precisely, to after 538. I was able to show that Simplicius, in his commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus, had adopted the ontological system of Damascius,[331] which does not preclude the presence in it of many doctrines identical to those of Proclus. For although one may speak of a 'return' to Iamblichus on the part of Damascius, Simplicius, and Priscianus, one must obviously emphasize, at the same time, that the philosophical system of Syrianus-Proclus-Ammonius already owed a great deal to Iamblichus, but less than that of Damascius, Simplicius and Priscianus, and also less than those of Plutarch of Athens and Hierocles. On this subject, I refer to the remark by D.P. Taormina concerning the 'subtle but solid' link that unites

328 Cf. above, p. 11 with note 35.

329 I have discussed the various hypotheses set forth on the subject of the fate of this philosophers after their stay in Persia in my article "Dans quel lieu le néoplatonicien Simplicius a-t-il fondé son école de mathématiques, et où a pu avoir lieu son entretien avec un manichéen?". See now I. Hadot 2014, pp. 13–101.

330 On the dates, cf. I. Hadot 1996, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur le* Manuel *d'Épictète*, Introduction et édition critique du texte grec, pp. 3–7. Cf. above, p. 126. The composition of the commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus can be dated to after the stay in Persia, and can probably be located in Harran, because of Simplicius' mention of a conversation he was able to have with a Manichean, and its doctrinal content: cf. I. Hadot 2007a and b, "Dans quel lieu le néoplatonicien Simplicius a-t-il fondé son école de mathématiques, et où a pu avoir lieu son entretien avec un manichéen", pp. 63–75. Cf. especially I. Hadot 2014, p. 31–52 and 155–170. One can say the same of the commentary on the *De anima* because of the name of its dedicatee. On this subject, see Ph. Vallat, "Le dedicataire d'un commentaire de Simplicius sur le *De anima* d'après le *Fihrist* d'Ibn al-Nadīm," in I. Hadot 2014, p. 102–129.

331 Cf. I. Hadot 1996, *Simplicius, Commentaire sur le Manuel d'Épictète*, pp. 62–111.

not only Iamblichus and Plutarch of Athens, but also these two philosophers and Priscianus of Lydia.[332] This return to Iamblichus was also expressed, as we shall see, in the very pronounced tendency of the members of Damascius' school to wish to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle.

As I have emphasized several times in the course of my expositions, this same article by D.P. Taormina provides an excellent demonstration of the influence that the stronger or weaker affinities of the various Neoplatonic philosophers with the philosophy of Iamblichus may have had on their tendencies to harmonize the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. Still according to this author, therefore, I continue the series of various interpretations of the comparison of the soul with an unwritten tablet[333] as proposed by Aristotle. Here is a text by Damascius,[334] which observes the full agreement between Plato and Aristotle on this subject:

> Socrates compares sensation to the scribe who writes forms in memory, the imagination to a painter, because of its reproductive power, opinion to a book, because of the faculty of reflection, combination, and definition. How does Plato also compare opinion [δόξαν] to a book, while affirming the same things as Aristotle? Indeed, the latter defines opinion as an unwritten tablet. He is not referring to sensible things: in fact, opinion produces by itself the general notions alone (τὰ γὰρ καθόλου μόνα προβάλλεται), it certainly does not [produce] sense impressions; these can therefore be represented as written in opinion, as in a book. Or rather, the forms are produced, in a way, from within, and in another way, are written from outside (πῶς μὲν οἴκοθεν προχειρίζεται τὰ εἴδη, πῶς δὲ ἔξωθεν ἐγγράφεται). Insofar as sensible things come to awaken memory, they [sc. the forms] come from outside, but since the soul has recourse to the general notions present within it, it is obvious that they come from within.

As far as Priscianus is concerned, as D.P. Taormina remarks (p. 228), in his *Metaphrasis in Theophrastum* (p. 32,33–35 Bywater) he calls Iamblichus and Plutarch of Athens "the authentic (γνήσιοι) interpreters of Aristotle", and he

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332 D.P. Taormina 1993, "Dynamique de l'écriture et processus cognitif …", p. 225; cf. above p. 102 (at the bottom) f.

333 Aristotle's text is cited above, at the middle of p. 148. The various interpretations are to be found above, p. 70 f., (Iamblichus), p. 89 f. (Themistius), p. 101 f., (Plutarch and Ammonius), p. 151 with note 307 (Proclus).

334 L.G. Westerink, *Damascius, Lectures on the Philebus*, Amsterdam 1959, §§ 174–175, p. 85, cited after the translation by D.P. Taormina 1993, p. 223.

emphasizes several times that he is following the works of Iamblichus on the soul, as well as the exegeses of Plutarch. I would add, however, that he nevertheless notes that in his *Metaphrasis* he will be studying primarily not the works of Iamblichus *On the soul*, but the works of Theophrastus.[335] As far as the scriptural metaphor is concerned, he uses it, in the words of D.P. Taormina, "by way of an introduction and conclusion to the problem of the knowledge of universals". Here is the introductory text:

> That is why the unwritten tablet must be understood by analogy, in relation to it [*scil.* to the intellect inherent in the soul]. In fact, the latter [must be understood] not as that which absolutely does not have the forms, but in the manner in which the intellect itself is in potentiality, not like that which is absolutely intellect, but like an intellect such that it needs to be made perfect by the first intellect: in the same way, also, the intelligibles within it are intelligible, but have need of an illumination from the separate [intelligibles] so as to be purely intelligible. That is why they are compared to colors, and the tablet is called unwritten insofar as it serves as a receptacle to these perfect forms.[336]

And Priscianus concludes as follows, emphasizing once again the agreement between Aristotle and Plato:

> This, then, is the way that being-in-potentiality should be understood as far as the intellect is concerned. And it seems to me that [Theophrastus] indicates that one must understand being-in-potentiality in the proper sense by alluding to the unwritten tablet, where it is introduced by Aristotle as the paradigm of the intellect in potentiality, so that we may consider what is unwritten as in the intellect, which, on the one hand, possesses the forms essentially and possesses [them] as perfect, and on the other hand is rendered perfect by the first intellect, and is written by means of the entelechy. From it, in fact, [derives] what is undivided and what is in the unity of perfection.[337]

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335 Priscianus, *Metaphr.*, p. 7,17–23 Bywater

336 Priscianus, *Metaphr.* pp. 26,29–27,3 Bywater, cited after the translation by D.P. Taormina 1993, p. 233.

337 Priscianus, *Metaphr.*, p. 35,23–29 Bywater, cited after the translation by D.P. Taormina 1993, p. 237 ff.

In this text, we find once again the same harmonizing interpretation as in Themistius,[338] which is different in the details from that of Iamblichus,[339] that is, the identification of the Aristotelian potential intellect with an unwritten tablet. By becoming perfect, this intellect will change into an intellect in act, with the two intellects together constituting two aspects of the rational human soul. The kinship between these two texts can be explained by their common use of the same work by Theophrastus.

To the examples given by D.P. Taormina, I will add a few passages from Simplicius. First, a parallel text taken from his commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, which testifies to the same harmonizing interpretation of Aristotle's metaphor. I strongly emphasize once again that unlike C. Steel, I do not see any valid reason to attribute this commentary to Priscianus.[340] We have seen (above, note 38, p. 66 and pages 67 f. and 71 f.), that Simplicius asserted that he made broad use of the works of Iamblichus in his own commentaries on the *Categories*, on book Λ of the *Metaphysics* and on the *De anima*, as Priscianus had done in his *Metaphrasis*. In the commentary on the *De anima* as in others, Simplicius also relied on Iamblichus' commentary on Plato's *Timaeus*.[341] In

338 Cf. above, p. 89 f.

339 Cf. above, p. 70 with note 50.

340 Cf. above, note 37, p. 65. Let us also mention the fact that C. Steel 1997, as he says himself (p. 137, note 10), has deliberately omitted the commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus in his comparison of Simplicius' commentaries among themselves. This omission is absolutely incomprehensible, because it so happens that it is precisely the commentary on the *Manual* that is much closer in its content to the commentary on the *De anima* than the other commentaries. The fact of having excluded the commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus has completely distorted C. Steel's results. I shall give only a single example: At p. 118 (4), C. Steel writes: "The doctrine of the προβολή or projection outwards of the soul is one of the most original contributions of his commentary in *De anima* [*scil.* of the commentary *In De anima* which C. Steel attributes to Priscianus] to the Neoplatonic doctrine of the soul. This doctrine, again, **is entirely absent from Simplicius' genuine work** [my emphasis], together with the vocabulary of προβάλλω, προβολή, προβλητικός that is so typical of the in *De anima*". Now it so happens, as I have pointed out (in I. Hadot 2002, "Simplicius ou Priscianus …", p. 192), that this vocabulary is amply present in Simplicius' commentary on the *Manual* of Epictetus and, what is more, is not original at all, for it already appears, along with the relevant doctrines, in Porphyry (*Sent.* 29, p. 18,8–9 and 20,8 Lamberz). Cf. also the Introduction by H.J. Blumenthal 2000 to his translation of *'Simplicius', On Aristotle on the soul 3.1–5*, which is rather critical toward the theses of C. Steel. The article "Priscien de Lyde" by M. Perkams 2012 basically repeats the arguments of C. Steel. Cf. now I. Hadot 2014, pp. 187–218, where the discussion on the authenticity of this commentary is developed in detail.

341 Cf. Simplicius, *In De anima*, p. 133,35 Hayduck.

this context, he occasionally also uses in addition the commentary by Plutarch of Athens on the *De anima*, and the books on *Physics* by Theophrastus, as Priscianus does in his *Metaphrasis*. The occurrence of similar texts and identical vocabulary can thus be easily explained by the use of the same sources.

Here, then, is part of the parallel text by Simplicius on Aristotle's metaphor:[342]

> That is why he says 'intellect is in a way potentially the intelligibles', this being clearly the one that thinks by being acted on [ὁ τῷ πάσχειν νῶν], and the one that is still imperfect. And this is potential in a way but not simply, like matter, both because of the intellect's self-produced perfection under the agency of the intelligibles, and because it is not just two, but in a way one, being the intellect that remains at rest and the one that proceeds, and so being in a way in act: but in that it proceeds, departs from itself and is still imperfect, it is potential and 'in actuality [ἐντελεχείᾳ] nothing before it thinks', before it becomes adequate to thinking on its own. This is the one that is likened to the tablet with nothing written on it; it too, being suitable for being written on, has not yet been written on. This is what our soul amounts to flowing away from its own substance to the outside and, being borne towards not knowing and ignorance of itself and of every formal substance, it needs to be perfected under the agency of something other [ὑφ' ἑτέρου]. That is by itself, but by itself *qua* other, since it has departed from itself and its own substance. So it is perfected by turning back to the substantial reason-principles [οὐσιώδεις λόγους] in itself, seeking and finding in accordance with them the truth about Beings [τῶν ὄντων],[343] and these [*scil.* the substantial reason-principles] are stimulated to contemplation and perfect the part of it that proceeds to the outside [τὸ ἔξω]. Therefore the intellect that proceeds is perfected by being written on, as it were, by acquiring something and from the outside [ἑτέρωθεν: I propose: 'also from the other side']. For it is perfected by substantial activity.

Let us note, once again, that the idea expressed in this text that potential intellect and intellect in act are merely two aspects of one and the same ontological entity: the rational human soul, had already been found in interpreting

342 Simplicius, *In De anima*, III, p. 236,13–28 Hayduck, quoted in the translation by H.J. Blumenthal 2000, *'Simplicius', On Aristotle on the soul* 3.1–5, p. 102.

343 I have modified the translation of H.J. Blumenthal, who rendered: "seeking and finding the truth about things that are in accordance with them".

Theophrastus by Themistius and Priscianus,[344] and it will be developed at length as well in Simplicius' commentary on the *Physics*, when he discusses the soul's automotricity, proclaimed by Plato and challenged by Aristotle. This commentary concerns Aristotle's *Physics*, VIII, 257a27 ff., a text that was already used by Themistius.[345] From this rather long discussion by Simplicius (p. 1232, 33–1250, 14 Diels), whose first part consists essentially in an explanation of Aristotle's text and a discussion of the interpretations of Eudemus of Rhodes, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Theophrastus, I shall quote only the last part (from p. 1247, 27 Diels). This part deals with the 'apparent' difference between Plato and Aristotle on the subject of the soul's automotricity, and brings out an argument that is rather similar to that of Themistius, and even Hermias. The arguments beginning at page 1249, 30 are parallel to such texts as Simplicius' *In De anima*, which I have just cited.[346] The translation is by M. Chase:[347]

> Since Aristotle seems to differ in his formulations from Plato with regard to what is self-moved, it would be well to look at this difference as well. Both clearly agree what is self-moved is the principle of motion and of all things in motion, Aristotle saying in this context that "if one had to investigate whether the cause and principle of motion is what moves itself or what is moved by something else, everyone would suppose it is the former" (Aristotle, *Physics* VIII,5,257a29). Plato, for his part, clearly called the self-moved "source and principle of motion" in the *Phaedrus* (245C), and in the tenth book of the *Laws* (X,895B) as well, where the Athenian stranger says in conclusion: "Consequently, as the principle of all motions, the first to occur among bodies at rest and the first in rank in moving bodies, the motion that moves itself we shall pronounce to be necessarily the eldest and mightiest of all changes". In addition, both say that living beings are self-moved, but Aristotle says that what is primarily and properly self-moved is the animal that is made up of soul and body, of which the body is moved while the soul causes motion while being unmoved by itself, while Plato will have it that what is primarily and properly self-moved is the entire soul, or, as the most exact among the interpreters say, the rational soul. It is through this soul that living beings come to be self-moved, once they partake of a trace of self-motion. And

344 Cf. Priscianus, *Metaphr.*, p. 30 et 31 Bywater, including quotations from Theophrastus.

345 Cf. above, p. 59, note 16.

346 Cf. above, p. 164.

347 M. Chase, in *Simplicius, On Aristotle Physics 8.1–5* (Ancient Commentators on Aristotle), 2012, pp. 165–168

that he would have the soul be what is self-moved in the proper sense, he indicates by giving its definition in the *Phaedrus*, and even more clearly in the tenth book of the *Laws* (X,895E[348]), when he says: 'Well, what is the definition (*logos*) of the thing for which soul is the name? Can we find any but the phrase we have just used, the substance that can move itself, which has the name we all call soul?'. That he will have it that it is through the fact that the soul is self-moved that the living being is also self-moved, he also indicated in the *Phaedrus* (245E), when he says: 'for any body that has an external source of motion is inanimate, but that which has it inside itself and from itself is animate, for such is the nature of the soul', that is, the one that moves itself and makes what participates ⟨in it⟩ appear to be self-moved. Thus, he made the living being's self-motion a testimony to psychic self-motion, but the cause of the former is the latter. The difference came about insofar as Plato grants that all change, both active and passive, is motion. In the *Timaeus* (37A), the soul 'speaks while in motion throughout its entirety', while in the tenth book of the *Laws* (X,896E ff.): 'Soul, then, by her own motions leads all things in sky, earth or sea—and the names of these motions are willing, concerning itself, investigating, deliberating, opining correctly or falsely, joyful or grieving, bold, fearful, hating, loving, and whatever primeval motions are akin to these'. Aristotle, by contrast, who esteems only physical changes worthy to be called motions, considers that the soul is active [ἐνεργεῖν] but is not moved [κινεῖσθαι]. He clearly denies physical motions of the soul in book one of *On the Soul* (I,3, 406a10), when he says: 'but since being moved is said in two senses'—that is, *per se* and accidentally—'now', he says, 'let us investigate whether the soul is moved *per se* and has a share in motion. But since there are four motions, translation, alteration, diminution, and increase, it would either be moved by one of them, or by several, or by all'. Yet Plato also denies them of the soul, enumerating them among the nine motions prior to the soul in the tenth book of the *Laws* (X, 894A–D), having transmitted the previously mentioned ones as motions of the soul.[349] And it is clear that Aristotle too attributes them to the soul, and knows that they take place from it and toward it, but he calls them not motions but activities [ἐνεργείας] and affects [πάθη]. That the soul knows and perfects

348 M. Chase 2012, remarks in a note: "The text as it stands omits lines 896A1–2. Kalbfleisch restored the omitted lines, which he thought had dropped out by homoioteleuton, but I have chosen to follow the manuscripts".

349 These motions are the ones that were enumerated shortly before: "willing, concerning itself, investigating" etc.

itself Aristotle necessarily knows, he who has philosophized so much about the soul, but having once assigned to bodies motion's tendency to make things depart from their current state,[350] he quite consistently does not think it well to call the soul self-moved, but the living being, on the ground that only motion in the sense of being moved is clear in the body; and since he also considers this to be the only motion in the thing moved, he sets aside motion ⟨in the soul⟩. **Here, therefore, the difference between the philosophers is not over a reality, but over a name, as it is in most cases. I think the reason often is that Aristotle wishes to preserve linguistic usage and to carry out his arguments on basis of what is evident to senses, while Plato often scorns them and readily resorts to intellective theories.** Aristotle, wishing to show in what sense of motion he is here taking 'self-moved', viz. in the sense of bodily motion, in which the soul is unmoved not only according to him, but also to Plato, made the beginning of his demonstration the fact that everything that is in motion is necessarily continuous and divisible into what is always divisible. But it is body that is such primarily. According to this ⟨sense of⟩ motion, then, what would be self-moved in the proper sense of the term if not the living being? For neither can the body cause motion, nor can the soul be moved by this motion, but the body is moved, whereas the soul causes motion while unmoved. Therefore, he does not wish any unified [*id est*: indivisible] whole [οὐδὲν ὅλον ἕν] to be self-moved, because in this sense of motion neither what is moved is able to cause motion primarily, nor can what causes motion be moved. He clearly pointed out the absurdity by saying (*Physics* VIII,5,257b2–6): 'for, being one and indivisible in form (ἓν ὂν καὶ ἄτομον τῷ εἴδει) it would be transported and would transport by the same transportation, and it would be altered and would alter, so that it would teach and learn at the same time, and would heal and be healed by the same health'. Thus, it would be simultaneously in potency and act, simultaneously not yet existing and already being in accordance with what it is said to be. In fact, being something one and simple, it could not be self-moved. After all, the soul, which possesses all the rational formulae (*logous*), has some of them close at hand and active, and others at rest and still in potency within it, and it moves the

350 Note by M. Chase: "*To ekstatikon tês kinêseôs*. A reference to *Physics* IV,13,222B16: *metabole de pasa phusei ekstatikon*, a difficult phrase omitted, for instance, in Hussey's translation of *Physics* III–IV (Oxford 1983). Hardie and Gaye translate 'it is in the nature of all change *to alter things from their former condition*'."

ones that are still in potency by those that are in act, but the latter are moved, so that the entire ⟨soul⟩ is said to be self-moved. Aristotle also concurs with these concepts, which are Platonic: for Aristotle as well, of the soul, one ⟨part⟩ is the intellect in potency, and another ⟨the intellect⟩ in act, and the one that is in potency comes to be in act by the one that is in act, with the soul teaching itself and learning from itself, and seeking and finding. For all discursive learning, as he himself teaches (*Posterior Analytics*, 1,71a1–2), that is, both seeking and finding, takes place from the preexistent knowledge that is in accordance with the intellect that is then active. This may be why, although he defines self-motion in accordance with natural motions, he interjected among his examples 'it would teach and learn', indicating the same thing. That there exists within the soul both teaching itself and learning from itself, not inasmuch as it is one and simple, which he himself said is indivisible in form, but being divided into what is in potency and what is in act. He therefore led the argument to this absurdity ⟨which states that⟩ the same thing, being one and indivisible in form, would be simultaneously in potency and in act, and both not yet existent and already existent, so that if someone were to take the soul to be divided into potency and act, it would no longer be absurd for the same thing to be in potency and act. The soul is thus self-active, self-knowing, and self-discovering according to Aristotle, yet not *qua* one and simple, but inasmuch as it is made up of potency and act. Yet he did not think it well to call it self-moved, because he observed motion only in bodies: for these are what are continuous and primarily divisible into what is always divisible. This is why motion is also continuous and divisible, and through motion, time. Yet how, according to the definition of motion he had laid down, which says that it is the entelechy of what is potential *qua* potential, can the soul fail to be moved and to be self-moved, if it progresses by itself from potency to act? Perhaps this definition, which states that it is the entelechy of what is potential *qua* potential, is common to all change, whether psychic or corporeal, and in general to the change that advances from potency to act; but the definition of motion *qua* motion in the particular sense is 'entelechy of the movable *qua* movable'. Thus, Aristotle does not think it well to call every change a motion, but the one that is habitual in the case of bodies. And not even all of the latter, for he distinguished generation and destruction from motion, because no one would say that what does not yet exist is moved in the proper sense of the term. What is in motion must be something in act, but have something in potency, acting in accordance with which it is said to be moved.

This text is nothing other than a very long development of what Themistius (cf. above, p. 59) had already stated succinctly.

I subjoin one last text by Simplicius, taken from his commentary on the *De anima*, which comments on the following text by Aristotle:[351]

> And this alone[352] is immortal and everlasting. We do not remember because this is impassible, while the passible intellect (παθητικὸς νοῦς)[353] is perishable, and without this it thinks nothing.

Here is what Simplicius writes:[354]

> **It is worth commenting on the whole argument by which he is encouraged to declare that the soul's substantial intellect is immortal and everlasting, so that thereby we may admire his harmony with Plato and also his greater working out of details, which Plato handed down in a more general and synoptic way appropriate to his earlier time.** It is not the case that because he only used the word 'movement' of a continuous and divisible entelechy he was not prepared to attach it to the soul as not being divisible, since if you change the word 'self-moved' and into 'self-living' and 'self-perfecting', 'self-producing' and 'acted on', it will become clear that the whole argument starts from this point. Indeed even in Plato 'self-movement' shows a certain duality in the soul. The 'self-', which he also habitually uses of the highest forms, applies to its being at rest and to its formal and productive nature, while to the 'moved' belong its being passible, proceeding, being perfected and being determined. So Aristotle starts from here and shows that the productive element in the soul, which Plato himself had said was separable and impassible and unmixed, is a principle and a kind of being that is causal and of a higher status than matter and everything that comes into being (for he has taken matter to stand for what comes into being), and also that it is activity in its substance because of its indivisible combination with the form. From there he takes its being immaterial (for everything that is in matter is divisible)

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351 Aristotle, *De anima* 430a23= Simplicius, *In De anima* III, p. 246,14–16 Hayduck.

352 That is, the ποιητικὸς νοῦς, or productive intellect, identified with the intellect in act by Priscianus, Simplicius and already by Themistius.

353 Identified with the common intellect of book I of Aristotle's *De anima* and with the irrational soul by the same three Neoplatonists.

354 Simplicius, *In De anima* III, pp. 246,17–247,15 Hayduck, cited in the translation by H.J. Blumenthal 2000, p. 115 ff.

> and active with respect to itself, and shows that everything immaterial thinks itself. And when he has shown that it is simultaneously thinking and object of thought and simple, in so far as it does not think with a part of itself and is not being thought with another part, but that the whole of it does both, he shows that it is immortal and everlasting. For what is separate and simple and its own and gives itself life and perfects itself, in such a way that in its inclination to the outside secondary lives and beings gush forth, is shown to be not only incapable of receiving death and destruction, but also to be predominantly the bearer of life and being, and thereby immortal too. So the whole argument, to put it together concisely, is something like this: it is clear that the question is only about our soul. In our soul there is not only what is acted on but also what acts, the principle and cause of the things that happen. Further what acts in the soul is able to think itself and unites its activity indivisibly with its substance. The principle and cause of the things that happen, and what is activity in its substance, is separable and simple. What is separable and simple belongs to itself and is not in anything other. This sort of thing cannot admit its opposite, lack of life and lack of substance (it will never admit the contrary in itself nor in anything else, since it belongs only to itself). So what acts in the soul, being unable to admit death and destruction, turns out to be necessarily immortal and indestructible, not primarily because of its inability to admit them, but, as has been said, on account of the fact that in its inclination to the outside it sources secondary substances and faculties.
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> This, as we have said, is discussed by Aristotle entirely in harmony with Plato's exposition starting from the soul's being self-moved. That it is about the soul, and not about the intellect participated by it nor, *a fortiori*, about the unparticipated intellect, but about our soul, has already been commented on by us …

Already these few texts cited by Priscianus and Simplicius clearly bring to light their doctrinal agreement in their harmonizing exegeses of Aristotle. These exegeses have many features in common with Themistius' paraphrase of Aristotle's *De anima*, including the discussions on the doctrine of the incomplete entelechy and the double entelechy.[355] A detailed investigation comparing

355 With regard to the incomplete entelechy and the complete entelechy, cf. Themistius above, p. 59; cf. Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1249,30 ff. (cf. above, p. 165 ff.), and on the double entelechy Themistius, *In De anima*, pp. 41,1–42,26 Heinze and Simplicius, *In De anima*,

Themistius' *Paraphrase* with both Simplicius' commentary on the *De anima* and with the *Metaphrasis* of Priscianus would, moreover, be highly desirable.

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p. 4, 12–32 Hayduck. Here is the text by Simplicius (translation J.O. Urmson, 1995, p. 17 ff., slightly modified): "Studying primarily the soul of mortals alone, he leaves not one of its powers and character uninvestigated. But first he gives the formal cause of their bodies, all together, not as bodies, but as living tools. For nature, not soul, is the formal cause of bodies, but that which informs them as living tools is 'either soul or a part of soul or not without soul' (Arist., *De part. an.*, I, 641a17 ff.) This is the formal cause, through which (καθ' ἥν) that which is vitally informed with life is able to move. That by which (ὑφ' ἧς) it is moved is something else. For the living being is moved by the soul as the ship is by its pilot, for the sailor also is counted an actuality (*entelecheia*). This soul which moves in a living way is, as we shall learn, somehow other than that in terms of which that which is so moved is defined, since that which moves is not the same as that which is moved, but is divided off in relation to it. … But also the tool is different from its user; also the characterising form of the tool is different from the user. Also the user is an actuality (*entelecheia*), like the sailor in his boat; for the actuality (*entelecheia*) is double, one in virtue of which it is a boat, the other as the sailor".

In this part of the introduction, Simplicius summarizes the beginning of book II of Aristotle's *De anima*, where it is said (412a19 ff., in the slightly modified transl. by J.A. Smith in J. Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle, the Revised Oxford Translation*, Princeton 1984, p. 656 ff.): "Of natural bodies, some have life in them, others not; by life we mean self-nutrition and growth and decay. It follows that every natural body which has life in it is a substance in the sense of a composite. Now given this is a body of such and such a kind, viz. having life, the soul cannot be a body …. Hence the soul must be a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it. But substance is actuality (*entelechy*), and thus soul is the actuality (*entelechy*) of a body as above characterized. Actuality is understood in two ways: sometimes as in knowledge, sometimes as in the art of speculating. It is obvious that the soul is an actuality like knowledge: for both sleeping and waking presuppose the existence of soul, and of these waking corresponds to speculating, sleeping to knowledge possessed but not employed, …. That is why the soul is an actuality (*entelechy*) of the first kind of a natural body having life potentially in it … (413a3 ff.). From this it is clear that the soul is inseparable from the body, or at any rate that certain parts of it are so … Yet some may be separable because they are not the actualities (*entelechies*) of any body at all. It is still uncertain whether the soul may not be the actuality of its body in the sense in which the navigator is the actuality of the ship".

Themistius' interpretation of this Aristotelian passage is as follows (translation by R.B. Todd 1996, pp. 60–61, very slightly modified of p. 42,32 ff. Heinze): "So the soul is like a first entelechy of something that is already alive and that can live in this way, and this is the compound [τὸ σύνθετον] i. e. 'that which is from both [matter and form]', and this can only be the living being. … p. 43,6 ff.: So it is clear from what has been said that the soul is the entelechy neither of the dead body, nor of the sperm, for the former has no life and the latter does not yet have life. … p. 43,14 ff.: Now being awake is an entelechy, as

As far as Priscianus' *Metaphrasis* and Simplicius' commentary on the *De anima* are concerned, this agreement struck Mr. Steel to such an extent that he wished to attribute these two works to a single author, in this case Priscianus.[356] I have deliberately subjoined to the two quotations from Simplicius' *In De anima* a long parallel extract from his commentary on the *Physics* to show that the argumentation there also follows the same schemes. This is a supplementary argument against the thesis of C. Steel.

As far as Simplicius and Priscianus are concerned, their very strong tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato has never been doubted, Yet it was perhaps not superfluous to emphasize that the dynamism of this tendency developed on the basis of the teaching of the Iamblichans Isidore and Damascius, in opposition to Syrianus-Proclus, among others, on this very point.

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are sawing and seeing. Sleep is like the kind of constitution and *hexis* from which sawing and seeing [come into existence]. Of these [entelechies], one is the first entelechy, the other the second. So while the soul is the entelechies, and more so the first, the body is the substrate. … So it is obvious that the soul is not separated from the body, either as a whole (if as a whole it is a form …), or in some of its parts (if it is naturally divided into parts). For some parts of the soul are clearly the entelechy and perfection of some parts of the body, as sight is of the eye, yet this does not stop those parts of the soul that … are not an entelechy of either the whole body, or of some [of its] parts, from also having the capacity to be separated from the body. The intellect too *seems* to be like this, for it is not yet clear whether it is an entelechy of a specific body as described, ⟨and, if so,⟩ whether it is the kind that is inseparable, or that is separated as the pilot is from the ship. For the [pilot] is an entelechy, but a separate one."

M. Perkams 2005, p. 526, as a faithful defender of the ideas of C. Steel, has not realized the parallel nature of these three texts, and along with it the ancient character of the doctrine of the double entelechy, which is in fact *in nuce* already present in Aristotle. He therefore takes this doctrine to be a novelty, and thinks that "the doctrine of the two entelechies was a response to Damascius' *On principles* …". For this reason, he proposes (p. 527) to date the commentary on the *De anima*, which he attributes to Priscianus, prior to 529. Since this dating is based on a false premise, it cannot be accepted. For a detailed discussion, cf. I. Hadot 2014, pp. 201–216.

356 Cf. above, p. 163, note 340.

Epilogue

I hope to have demonstrated that the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato lasted from Porphyry throughout the entire period of Neoplatonism, including Themistius. In other words, throughout this entire period there is not, as far as I know, any exception to this rule in all of Neoplatonic literature, insofar as it has come down to us. From Porphyry to Simplicius, the Aristotelian cursus was always conceived as a necessary preparation for the Platonic cursus, a fact which implies a belief in the superiority (but not the infallibility) of Plato as compared to Aristotle, along with the belief in a more or less broad agreement between the two philosophers. Indeed, it is only the extent of this agreement that is subject to variations. But I also believe I have shown that it is not the schools themselves, for instance, those of Athens and of Alexandria, that differ from one another by the intensity of this will to harmonization, but groups of philosophers within these schools. For instance, the beginning of the school of Athens under Plutarch—judging not only by the testimony of his disciple Hierocles, but also by the fragments of Plutarch's work—is marked by a strong adherence to this tendency, under the influence of Iamblichus. This adherence reaches its weakest point under Syrianus-Proclus, to regain all its strength at the end of Neoplatonism with Damascius-Simplicius-Priscianus, thanks to a resolute return to the philosophy of Iamblichus, among others, on this point. This is why, if we take into account the entire duration of each of the schools, it is impossible to find a global opposition concerning the vigor of this tendency between the schools of Athens and Alexandria. The intensity of the tendency toward harmonization of the Athenian Plutarch is identical to that of his disciple Hierocles, who taught at Alexandria, and that of Ammonius and his school seems to be situated halfway between that of Syrianus-Proclus and that of Damascius and his school. Moreover, the mutual interdependence of the two schools would already have prevented such diversity all by itself: the diadochs of the school of Athens trained the future philosophers teaching at Alexandria, and Damascius, after having learned philosophy under Isidore and Ammonius at Alexandria, and with Zenodotus at Athens, became diadoch of the school of Athens. Likewise, P. Golitsis' belief that the school of Athens was more focused on Plato and pagan religiosity, whereas the school of Alexandria was more interested in Aristotle and omitted the *Chaldaean Oracles* and Orphism, is contradicted by the facts I set forth in the Introduction, to which one must add Olympiodorus' links with Hermeticism and alchemy, which the research of C. Viano has revealed, and which I briefly discussed: the difference between the two

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schools is merely institutional. In the chapter on Themistius, by contrast, I have collected a few indications suggesting that alongside what is called 'school of Athens' and 'school of Alexandria', other Neoplatonic schools existed which were not interested in theurgy, and had little interest in the *Chaldaean* Oracles, for instance at Constantinople (Themistius), Sicyon (the philosopher from Sicyon), and even at Athens, still at the time of Plutarch of Athens or shortly before (partisans of Theodore of Asine).

Although the central subject of this study was the development of the tendency to harmonize the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato in Neoplatonism, doctrinal questions were not left completely aside. Thus, a rather lengthy chapter was devoted to identifying Themistius as a Neoplatonist. With regard to the often-affirmed divergence between Ammonius and his school, on the one hand, and Syrianus-Proclus on the other, I was able to rely many times on the work of L. Cardullo, which has confirmed my initial assumption of a much greater conformity between these philosophers than one has often wished to admit. In this context, it was emphasized that one should not compare what is not comparable, for instance commentaries on the *Categories* with commentaries on the dialogues of Plato, nor should one neglect the fact that for the Neoplatonists, Aristotle's *Metaphysics* was not on the same theological level as Plato's *Parmenides*, as is proved by the definitions of the goals (*skopoi*) of Asclepius' commentary on the *Metaphysics*, and Proclus' commentary on the *Parmenides*.

In addition, to avoid hasty conclusions concerning the identity of authors, by researchers who, upon reading ancient commentators, find themselves confronted with parallel texts and identical quotations, I also discussed the results of a comparison among all the preserved Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Categories*. These results demonstrate the interdependence of the commentaries in question, caused by a common school tradition and implying the presence of many parallel texts and quotations in different authors.

Unfortunately, the case of the Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle's *Categories* is unique, in the sense that we do not possess a sufficient number of Neoplatonic commentaries on any other Aristotelian or Platonic treatise to be able to undertake comparisons over a period of several centuries. This is not by chance: the commentaries on Aristotle's logic were more resistant to Christian censorship than, for instance, the various Neoplatonic commentaries on the *Chaldaean Oracles*, none of which have been preserved for us. Yet one must admit that as far as the latter are concerned, their disappearance was not due entirely to the Christians. For the pagan philosophers, these were mysteries that were not to be divulged, and were consequently interpreted only in front of a very small number of select students, who were obliged to keep silent.

In the face of this shipwreck of Neoplatonic literature, the historian of ancient philosophy must often resign himself to doubt. It was thus completely intentional that, in the course of my exposition, I insisted several times on a remaining uncertainty. To be sure, judging by the *membra disiecta* of our sources, the tendency to the harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle reigned without exception from Porphyry to Simplicius, finding echoes as far as Arabic literature. It cannot be excluded, however, that this will to harmonization may have been challenged during this period, without us having maintained any traces of it, in some of the numerous other cities of the Roman Empire in which Neoplatonic philosophy was taught.

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